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The ability to communicate effectively--to transmit understanding and motivation from one person to another--is vitally important to program and functional managers and to others. In the present socio-politico-industrial economy, old management attitudes and communication techniques are no longer adequate. Modern managers are challenged to find new ways to meet today's conditions. Good communication between the manager and his subordinates at all levels in the organization--in the public or private sector--is essential. If communication is good, it informs, persuades, and motivates. Therefore, it is important for the management of any organization to evaluate the communication process on a regular basis and make any necessary adjustments.

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DEFENSE SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT COLLEGE

SKILL IN COMMUNICATION

Second Edition

March 18, 1992

A Vital Element in Effective Management

David D. Acker

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PREFACE

Are you locked in a room with an open door? Have you ever approached the doorway to view the opportunities which lie beyond it? The opportunities are many and they are available to anyone who wants to take advantage of them.

One opportunity available is to improve your skill in communication. Have you taken steps to do something about it? If not, start now by taking one or more of the steps suggested in this book.

The book is the outgrowth of a series of articles that appeared in *Program Manager*, the Defense Systems Management College bimonthly journal.

The ability to communicate effectively—to transmit understanding and motivation from one person to another—is vitally important to program and functional managers and to others. In the present socio-politico-industrial economy, old management attitudes and communication techniques are no longer adequate. Modern managers are challenged to find new ways to meet today's conditions. Lawrence A. Appley, former chairman of the board of the American Management Association, once stated that, with regard to managing in coming years,

> A new kind of manager must evolve who can work with a group and consider himself, or herself, to be the recipient, and evaluator, and utilizer of the skills, talents, and creativity of those who are working with him, the attainment of jointly arrived at objectives.

Without an effective flow of communication, up and down the chain of command within the organization, this possibility is only a dream.

Another important aspect of communication in today's environment involves its impact on time. Former president of the Bank of America, A. W. Clausen, spoke to this subject when he said, "Perhaps the scarcest commodity among business executives is time. The young person who has learned to save time by presenting ideas clearly, concisely, and persuasively has taken a major step toward success."

There is no substitute for good face-to-face communication. Companies doing business with the federal government on system acquisition programs make strong efforts to communicate well. To the extent that they develop and produce the desired products, and provide the desired services, there is evidence that the communication has been good.

Good communication between the government and its contractors, or between the contractor and his subcontractors, is imperative. Lack of good communication adversely affects end products and services.

Good communication between the manager and his* subordinates at all levels in the organization—in the public or private sector—is essential. If communication is good, it informs, persuades, and motivates. Therefore, it is important for the management of any organization to evaluate the communication process on a regular basis and make any necessary adjustments.

I hope you can use the thoughts and ideas presented here to review, evaluate, and improve your communicating ability and the communication process within your organization. If so, more efficient management and increased productivity surely will result.

Don't stay locked in a room with an open door. Pass through the doorway to the opportunity which lies ahead to improve your skill in communication. The rewards are yours for the taking. Claim them today.

April 1990
Fort Belvoir, Virginia

David D. Acker

*Whenever in this book "man," "men," or their related pronouns appear, either as words or parts of words (other than with obvious reference to named male individuals), they have been used for literary purposes and are meant in their generic sense.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my special appreciation to Esther M. Farria and Catherine M. Clark who reviewed the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. I also wish to thank Greg Caruth, who was responsible for the graphics design and layout of the book.

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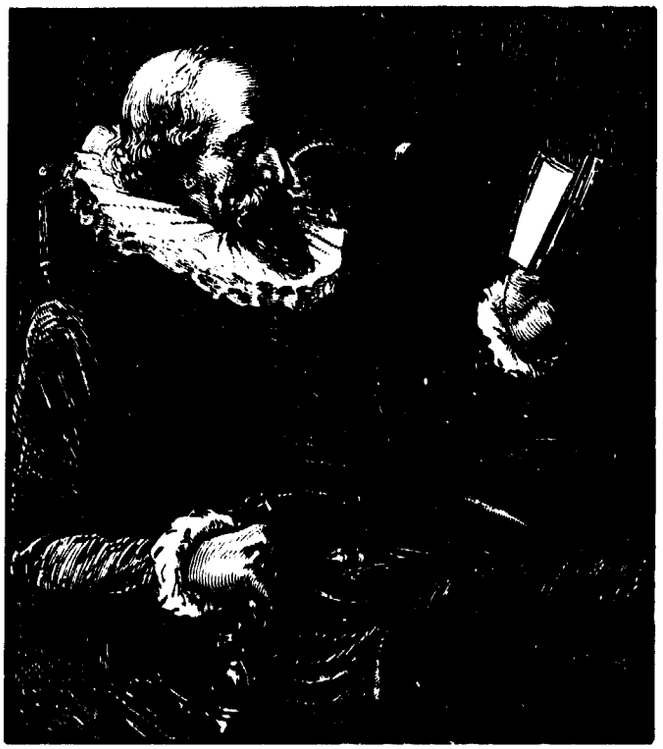
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Communication is the cornerstone of business. Managers use many different channels to communicate with others, and [they] spend between 50 percent and 90 percent of their day in communication of one kind or another. Communication [fortunately] is a set of skills you can learn....

—Elaine Zuker
The Assertive Manager



The man who does not read good books has not advantage over the man who can't read them.

—Mark Twain

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David D. Acker, Professor of Management at the Defense Systems Management College, is currently serving as a senior member of the research staff in the Research and Information Department. Since he came to DSMC in 1973, he has served as Acting Dean and Associate Dean of Administration; Acting Director, Department of Plans and Programs; Chief, Programs Division; and Chief, Plans Division. Further, he has been a member of the teaching faculty.

From 1970 to 1973, Mr. Acker served as a staff specialist in the Plans and Policy Office of the Directorate of Defense Research and Engineering, Office of the Secretary of Defense. Prior to coming to Washington, Mr. Acker spent 20 years with Rockwell International, the last 4 of which he reported to the Senior Vice President, Research and Engineering, at the Executive Offices. While at the Autonetics Division, he was successively responsible for the design and supervision of design of navigation/guidance systems, and for project engineering and program management on several major Army, Navy and Air Force defense system programs. While at the Executive Offices, he served not only as a consultant on defense systems programs, but on NASA and DOE programs, also. Before accepting a position at Rockwell International, Mr. Acker gained his early industrial experience in tool and machine design, and in various production engineering assignments on the East Coast.

Mr. Acker has been a member of the engineering faculty at Rutgers University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, as well as a visiting lecturer at several private, state, and U.S. government universities and colleges. He has addressed or chaired many meetings of professional societies and service clubs, as well as government/industry seminars and conferences. He is the author of more than 175 published papers and the author/editor of 5 books.

Mr. Acker received a B.S.M.E. degree and an M.S. degree from Rutgers University. He is a lifetime/senior member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, the American Society for Engineering Education and Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society. He is listed in *Who's Who in the South and Southwest*. He is serving a second term as a member of the Gantt Board of Award, and is serving (or has served) as a member of various government/industry working groups in NSIA, EIA, AIA, and ADPA.

Mr. Acker's lifetime concern with improving communications in the world around us led to the writing of the first edition of *Skill In Communication: A Vital Element In Effective Management*. It gained immediate acceptance, and comments received during the past 10 years led to the preparation of this second edition.



That is a good book which is opened with expectation and closed with profit.

—Amos Bronson Alcott

1

INTRODUCTION

We are judged by the way we communicate. Although few people are qualified to judge how well we carry out our daily assignments, everyone is qualified—or thinks he is qualified—to judge the way we write, speak, or listen. Also, there is reading. Do you read well? Can you grasp the meaning of everything you read each day?

Communication skills can be learned. As we climb the ladder in our field of endeavor, these skills become more important to us—and our other skills usually become less important. Obviously, you feel a need to improve your communication skills, or you wouldn't be reading this book. Hopefully, you will find many helpful suggestions for self-improvement in the following pages.

Where do you start? You are the best judge of your needs. These needs, of course, are based upon the present level of your communication skills and daily activities. Do you spend most of your time writing? Speaking? Listening? Reading? In meetings? Armed with the answers to these questions, you can determine where to begin.

What Communication Is

Communication, in its broadest sense, may be considered a chain of events in which the message serves as the basic link. The chain connects the transmitter (the source of the message) with the receiver (the interpreter of the message). According to the *Encyclopedia Americana,* communication is the

> source and extension of imagination in a form that can be learned and shared. It is the production, perception, and understanding of messages that bear man's notion of what is, what is important, what is right, and what is related to something else.[1]

Before originating any communication, you should be able to answer this question affirmatively: "Is my message clear, true, wise, and necessary?" If the answer is

not affirmative in all respects, the message should not be sent as initially planned.

From the time Samuel F. B. Morse tapped out the first telegraph message to his partner, Alfred Vail, in May 1844, mankind has been living in an age characterized by a myriad of marvelous devices for rapid transmission of information. It behooves all of us to use these devices wisely and effectively. We can do so by ensuring at the outset that our messages are clear, true, wise, and necessary. The rapid transmission of ill-conceived, false, unwise, and unnecessary messages will avail us nothing.

Communication Milestones

Before proceeding, I would like to turn your attention to the communication milestones (see chart on pages 5 and 6). No one knows when man started to communicate verbally or through sign language. However, some of the outstanding achievements have been dated.

To begin, the chief organic means of communication has always been the hands, brains, eyes, ears, and mouths of men. However, it is not known when and how man first learned to use these organs to communicate with his fellow man.

Our first evidence of written communication is found in the visual art of the Paleolithic people. Their art was discovered in the caves of Europe and rocks of Africa and the Arctic. This primitive art appears to have merged into the more decorative and utilitarian home art of the Neolithic herdsmen and farmers. It is interesting to note that the cave art and home art of more than 20,000 years ago displayed the same "aesthetic tastes and the basic handicraft techniques of drawing painting, stenciling, engraving, modeling, and sculpturing known to modern man."[2] The art of these non-literate people served the same functions as artistic communication today. It is the type of communication that relates individual vision and imagination to the consciousness of a culture.

As man's language developed, he began to string pictures together to tell stories. The accounts and records of the non-literate people were displayed in the stories on pictograms. These pictograms showed things; however, they did not make statements, convey instructions, issue commands, record contracts, or embody the concepts of function, time, or action.

In circa 3500 B.C., the Sumerians bridged the gap between sign writing and sound writing with the help of their neighbors—the Egyptians, Indians, and Semites. This advancement in communication, with communication milestones through the ages since that time, is depicted in the chronoligical listing that follows.

Additional Comments

First, communication has been, and will continue to be, a basic human activity. The world has become "smaller" because of it. Our whole way of life today would crumble around us without it.

Second, although communication is a basic human activity, it is not always accomplished successfully. How easy is it for you to communicate to another person exactly what you would like that person to know? We are so easily misunderstood. We have trouble getting our message across to the receiver

COMMUNICATION MILESTONES

B.C.

c.20,000	Approximate date of the earliest prehistoric cave paintings
c.3500	Egyptians developed a picture language called hieroglyphics; about the same time, the Sumerians—with assistance of Egyptians, Indians, and Semites—developed unclassified language, preserved in cuneiform on clay tablets
c.2500	Egyptians invented papyrus
c.1800	First true alphabet developed in the Middle East
1580	World's first book, the Book of the Dead, written in Egypt
540	First public library opened in Athens
300	Hindus invented numerals
200	Greeks perfected parchment
100	Greeks and Romans developed ink from cuttlefish
100	Romans mass produced books and developed first copyright and censorship laws
63	Roman slave, Marcus Tullius Tiro, invented system of shorthand

A.D.

105	Chinese developed paper
150	Parchment folded into pages; books took familiar shape
700	Block printing used in Asia
868	The Diamond Sutra became first complete block-printed book
1450	Johannes Gutenberg, a German, invented movable metal type
1477	William Caxton set up first printing press in Westminster, England
1550	Newspapers began to appear in Europe
1591	First post office founded by proclamation of Queen Elizabeth I
1684	Dr. Robert Hooke invented shutter semaphore
1731	First magazine, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, published in London
1793	Claude Chappe and his brothers developed semaphore system for use throughout Europe
1822	Nicephore Niepce, a Frenchman, built first phonograph
1837	Samuel F. B. Morse invented telegraph
1868	Christopher L. Sholes invented typewriter

1876	Alexander Graham Bell invented telephone
1877	Thomas A. Edison developed phonograph
1884	L. E. Waterman developed first practical fountain pen
1886	Ottmar Mergenthaler produced first typesetting machine
1889	George Eastman developed first practical photographic film
1894	Lumiere Brothers invented first practical motion picture system
1895	Guglielmo Marconi perfected wireless
1906	Reginald Aubrey Fessenden made first radio broadcast
1923	Charles Francis Jenkins developed television
1926	Warner Brothers produced first sound film
1927	John Logie Baird in London used waxed phonograph discs to record television (TV) images
1951	Bing Crosby Enterprises demonstrated the first working magnetic video tape recorder
1954	Color television introduced in the United States
1956	Ampex unveiled its commercial quadruplex videotape recorder for broadcasting
1959	American astronomers established radar contact with Venus
1960	American engineers invented lasers
1962	Telestar satellite established telephone and television contact between the United States and Europe
1965	Intelsat launched first global communications satellite system
1965	Magnetic video recording provided a magnetic disc for video recording with a stop action and instant replay feature
1967	Sony introduced the first small videotape recording (VTR) system
1968	Ampex introduced first color VTR
1968	Voice and television communication took place between the United States and astronauts circling the moon
1972	Sony introduced first videocassette recorder (VCR)
1975	Sony introduced the Betamax (BETA) cassette
1977	Matsushita introduced the vehicular head scan (VHS) cassette
1978	Magnavox introduced the laser video disc player
1980	U. S. Pioneer entered the consumer disc market
1981	RCA introduced the video disc player
1983-84	Beta and VHS High Fidelity (HiFi) introduced to consumer market
1984	Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved stereo television broadcasting

because he is not attuned to what we have to say. Conversely, we have trouble receiving and properly interpreting the messages directed to us. For any communication to be successful, it must be received, get the receiver's attention, be interpreted correctly, and be acted upon appropriately.

Third, the urge to communicate successfully, and to measure up to the challenge presented by the multiplicity of media available today, requires clarity of mind and singleness of purpose. This ability is one that you--or your organization—might not possess. Although your organization may have sufficient funding available to command a full galaxy of communication media, it might be difficult to buy the wisdom and integrity demanded for their use.

Fourth, the determining factor in successful communication might really be conviction. When the person transmitting the message knows exactly what he believes, his authoritative statements will be carried into the hearts of the receivers of that message. The message will not be denied, because it has poured forth from the spirit of the person who transmitted it. In this case, the form of communication does not matter. The people receiving the message will give it attention because they know the transmitter believes in his cause. No new marvel of technology will ever be able to bestow that quality upon a message from someone who has nothing to say because he believes nothing.

Fifth, effective communication between two or more persons is based on a meeting of minds. Such a "meeting" relies on mutual respect, an appreciation of the other person's viewpoint, and the ability of the receivers to comprehend the message.

Although the successful functioning of any organization cannot be attributed to a single factor, the term "effective communication" must be weighted heavily in any success-oriented equation.

Endnotes

1. *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, Vol. 7, New York, Americana Corporation, 1976, p. 423.
2. Ibid., p. 424.



We have too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them.

—Abigaii Adams

II

COMMUNICATION PROCESS

At the outset, we must recognize that communication is a complicated, two-way process. It takes place when one individual transmits ideas (or feelings) to another individual—or group of individuals. The effectiveness with which this process is carried out can be measured by analyzing the similarity between the message when it was initiated and when it was received.

Communication is the tool management uses to get things done. Without it, a manager is as ineffectual as a carpenter without his kit of tools. While it is a management skill, communication is also an essential part of all other management skills. After a manager has established organizational goals, developed reasonable forecasts, made plans, established the organizational structure, and acquired personnel needed, nothing happens if he is unable to communicate effectively with his people. The degree of success in accomplishing roles and missions of the organization depends upon the clarity of his statement of the roles and missions—upon his skill in transferring the concept to others in the organization. The manager must communicate the content of his message, and convey a positive attitude to those who receive it.

Communication has been described by some as an atmosphere. If the atmosphere is not favorable, misunderstandings occur and inefficiency or even failure results. The best advice one can give to a manager, who wishes to create a receptive atmosphere, is to suggest that he speak or write as he would like to be spoken or written to.

In our daily lives, we play the roles of transmitter (source of the message) and receiver over and over. We are judged by the way we transmit—by writing, speaking or body language—the message and by the way we receive the response. The effective manager, through skill in communication, can lead the members of his organization to play their roles effectively.

This chapter, devoted to communicating effectively in the office, will cover oral (listening) and written (reading) input, as well as oral (speaking) and written (writing) output. Of course, there are also hybrid inputs and outputs that should be recognized. A written input is received aurally when someone reads aloud to us. The converse of this is when we receive the oral output of written material, such as when a speaker "reads" his paper. One of the most useful hybrids is the oral production of written material, commonly referred to as "dictation."

The Transmitter And the Message

The transmitter of the message starts the communication process by deciding what information to communicate to others and how to transmit it. It is his responsibility to ensure that the information to be transmitted is correct and objective. First, he composes the message in his mind, based on past experience. Next, he organizes it in a logical sequence so the receiver will understand it easily and not get a distorted message. Before proceeding, however, he makes an estimate of the knowledge the receiver has of the subject so that he can convey it in terms most understandable to the receiver. Finally, he selects the best method for transmitting the message.

Message Transmittal

The message can be transmitted orally; in writing; by "body language," as with gestures or expressions; or by a combination of spoken words and bodily actions. The best means to transmit the message usually depends upon the situation at any given time. For example, a program manager with a widely dispersed organization would probably communicate in writing, whereas the manager of a small program office might communicate orally with his staff.

The Receiver

The message, its composition, and the means of transmittal are critical to success in the communication process. The receiver of the message must be able to understand and "decode it." If the receiver does not pay proper attention to the message, the information can become distorted. The receiver can guard against such distortion by being objective in his interpretation of what he receives.

The problems of transmitting a message from manager to subordinates, and of their forwarding it to others without distortion, is clearly illustrated in this story that made the rounds several years ago. The author and title are unknown, but for illustrative purposes it can be identified as "Operation Halley's Comet."

A colonel issues the following directive to his executive officer: Tomorrow evening at approximately 2000 hour Halley's Comet will be visible in this area, an event that occurs only once every 75 years. Have the men fall out in the battalion area in fatigues, and I will explain this rare phenomenon to them. If it rains, we will not be able to see it. In that case, assemble the men in the theater and I will show them films of it.

Executive officer to company commander: By order of the colonel, tomorrow at 2000 hours, Halley's Comet will appear above the battalion area. If it rains, have the men fall out in fatigues and march to the

theater where this rare phenomenon will take place, something that occurs only once every 75 years.

Company commander to lieutenant: By order of the colonel in fatigues, at 2000 hours tomorrow evening the phenomenal Halley's Comet will appear in the theater. If it rains in the battalion area, the colonel will give another order, something that occurs only once in every 75 years.

Lieutenant to sergeant: Tomorrow at 2000 hours, the colonel will appear in fatigues in the theater with Halley's Comet, something that occurs every 75 years. If it rains, the colonel will order the comet into the battalion area.

Sergeant to squad: When it rains tomorrow at 2000 hours, the phenomenal 75-year-old General Halley, accompanied by the colonel, will drive his Comet through the battalion area theater in fatigues.

This illustrates the distortion that can occur if a message is passed along verbally through many people. In this situation, the orders would have been clearer to those under the colonel's command if he had published the orders. They could then have been read directly—and without interpretation—by all who had a need to know.

Feedback

Feedback is a very important part of the communication process. It becomes the transmitter's knowledge of the results or effect of his message on the receiver. In short, feedback is reaction. For example, when a program manager tells a subordinate about a recent briefing at higher headquarters, he expects to see some kind of reaction to what he's saying. In the foregoing story, the colonel directed that something be done. He expected to see his order carried out.

Feedback is usually achieved in two-way communications; however, it can be blocked by absence of direct face-to-face communication with the ultimate receiver of the message—as in the story—or by distance, when a written or recorded message must be sent. Communication is improved when the originator of the message receives immediate feedback.

It is through feedback that the transmitter decides how to frame his communication. Further, it is through feedback that the transmitter can build up a picture of the receiver's attitude and predict future responses. Factual feedback has measurable effects and perceptual feedback can change attitudes. Conversely, without feedback on his performance, a subordinate may find it difficult to control or correct behavior.

Where Does One Start?

Where does the manager start the process of improving his communication skills? The answer should be based upon an evaluation of his present abilities and current needs. By what method does he communicate most often? Is it by writing, speaking, listening or reading? Students of the art of communication say that most of us want to learn to write better and we fail to realize how poorly we listen. Toastmaster clubs are popular with those who wish to improve their speaking abilities, and speed-

reading courses have received much attention in the past few years.

Let's consider briefly the various forms of communication.

Encoding Skills

Writing tends to be an artificial communication skill, requiring more human effort than speaking. As with public speaking, practice can improve this skill. We don't learn to write better by reading about how to do it, but we improve our writing ability almost every time we prepare a document. We improve quickly if we make a conscious effort to do so.

Speaking is a natural communication skill; however, public speaking is not. We can improve our public speaking ability by studying techniques of successful speakers and by experience. Unfortunately for most of us, there are fewer opportunities to speak publicly than to write. If we are really serious about improving our abilities as speakers, we must earnestly seek opportunities to speak. Speaking before small groups provides us with a fine opportunity to practice basic techniques.

Decoding Skills

Listening is probably the most important, but usually most neglected, aspect of the communication process. This skill consists of a complex interrelation of hearing, analysis, understanding, and retention. Although effective listening may be difficult to learn, we all have many opportunities to do so.

Reading is another communication skill that can be improved by practice. Few of us read as rapidly as we are potentially capable of doing. There are many opportunities every day to develop this communication skill. Tried and tested speed-reading courses are available in most areas of the country for those wishing to learn this technique.

Kinds of Information People Need

To function effectively on the job, we generally need four kinds of information:

—Performance information—the information required to perform effectively on the job

—Coordination information—information received through lateral and vertical communications

—Technical information

—Motivational information

How well this information is communicated to and among employees in an organization, as well as to and from sources outside the organization, becomes one of the measures of successful operation of that organization.

Communication Roadblocks

There are three barriers to conveying information effectively to people who need it: lack of a common core of experience between the transmitter and receiver of the message, failure of the transmitter to clearly distinguish between symbols and the things they symbolize, and the overuse of abstractions in the message by the transmitter.

Communication is most effective when the experiences of the originator of the message and the one to whom it is directed are similar. Words do not transport meanings from speaker to listener—or from writer to reader—in

the same way that a truckload of cattle is transported from the range to the stockyards. In fact, words never carry precisely the same meaning from the mind of the transmitter of the message to the mind of the receiver. The words used in a communication—spoken or written—simply serve as stimuli to generate a response from the recipient. The nature of that response is conditioned by the past experience of the one receiving the stimuli. When the receiver's experience is similar to that of the initiator of the communication, the words will probably convey the intended message to the listener or reader.

Words represent, or correspond to, something that exists—or that is experienced—or that people talk about. Disraeli, the nineteenth century politician, believed that "words are vessels for me to pour meaning into."

There is nothing in our language that prevents words from being used in any way intended by the speaker or writer. Actually, words and reality may be quite different, but we often fail to make the necessary distinction between the two. We must realize that if we are to communicate effectively, we must make a concerted effort in our communications not to confuse symbols with the things they symbolize; i.e., we must ensure that the two are kept in their true perspectives.

Abstract words are necessary and useful in the communication process. They serve well as shorthand expressions for summing up vast areas of experience. However, abstract words never convey specific ideas or thoughts to the receiver of the message. On the other hand, concrete words refer to objects or things the receiver can experience directly. When concrete words are used, the transmitter has better control of the image produced in the mind of the recipient of the message.

When one person communicates with another, it is generally assumed by the transmitter that the receiver will understand the intended message. We previously learned that errors can occur because of word selection, gestures, etc. Even when the factual part of the communication is successful, wrong implications may be drawn on some occasions because of the receiver's own needs, motives, or past experiences. The communication is more apt to be successful if both people are on the "same wave length" (they have a similar frame of reference).

Trust

It is widely recognized that the essence of teamwork is mutual confidence. This confidence, of course, is founded upon an exchange of trustworthy information. On the other hand, conflict is a prime cause of increasing tension, decreasing trust, and communication problems. Also, the reception of information received is affected by the background of the receiver. Distortion may occur, for example, when the transmitter of the message is disliked or mistrusted. When these feelings are mutual, double distortions may take place. Further, in the absence of mutual trust, increased communication tends to exaggerate existing differences and diminish any consensus of opinion that may have been possible if they had communicated less.

Morale

The morale of a subordinate is related to his feeling of freedom to communicate with his manager.

In his role as leader and transmitter of messages, it is the duty of the program manager—or any manager—to be aware of the cardinal elements of the communication process, the relationships between them, and the inherent barriers to effective transmittal of ideas and feelings. In essence, the effectiveness of the communication process rests—in a large measure—with the participants' basic understanding of it.

Final Observations

We have seen that the communication process is composed of three parts: (1) the transmitter (source) of the information, (2) the receiver of the information, and (3) the receiver's understanding of the information received. Information is transmitted from the source to the receiver, who interprets what he has read, heard, or observed. The better the process of transmission, the better the chances are that the message will be interpreted as the originator intended.

The ability of a program manager—or any manager—to communicate up and down the line (vertically) as well as across organizational lines (horizontally) is an important element of his success. Keith Davis has said that "the only way that management can be achieved in an organization is through the process of communication."

The policies and procedures in the program office—government or industry—communicate to the employees what management considers important. Unfortunately, too often the message actually communicated, and the effect it has, is not what the sender intended. Also, information, when transmitted through one of more persons or organizations before reaching the ultimate receiver, will probably be altered—not intentionally in most cases—by those in the receiving (transmittal) line. In the final analysis, what the ultimate receiver understands is his basis for action becomes the real measure of management's success in transmitting the message.

In summary, communication within any organization is a complex process. Good managers soon discover it is only partly manageable. Furthermore, no manager can control the source of every communication or distortions in the messages conveyed through his organization. However, every manager has a personal obligation and must encourage his subordinates, to give thoughtful consideration to the messages generated within or passing through the organization.

An old German proverb states, "A man is seldom better than his conversation." It might be rephrased to say, "A man is seldom better than his prowess in communication." Do you get the message?



Of all those arts
in which the wise excel,
Nature's chief masterpiece
is writing well.

--John Sheffield,
Duke of
Buckinghamshire

III

WRITING SKILLS

Language is the principal means of communication. In this chapter on skill in communication, we will be concerned with only one aspect of language—the written word. This is a highly developed and very complicated aspect. To the program or functional manager, it is very important, because there is no communication unless the receiver of the written communication understands the thoughts and ideas of the writer.

The basic purpose of any written communication is to convey a message to the reader. To serve this purpose well, the message must be easily understood and quickly read. A well-written document approaches the subject logically and shows the writer has a thorough knowledge of the subject. The message is simple, clear, and direct.

The importance of effective written communication has been of concern to many people. Joan Griewank, Director of CBS Records, reflecting on the written word says, "Many people who are good on their feet can't put together four good sentences in a row." Jack Shaw, partner in the accounting firm of Touche, Ross & Co., is quoted as saying, "It's hard for me to believe grown men write the kinds of things I see in some client organizations." Many industrial firms are offering writing courses or seminars for managers to overcome observed deficiencies.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Written Communication

The decision to use written rather than oral communication often rests with the program or functional manager—the communicator. In such cases, the communicator must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each form of communication in order to make an intelligent decision.

The advantage of oral over written communication is that a complete interchange of thoughts and ideas can take place faster. The speaker is in direct contact with the listener (receiver) and is challenged to make himself understood. Too

frequently the listener fails to ask the right questions, so he does not receive the message clearly. This, in turn, can result in wasted efforts and costly errors.

Written communications also have advantages. They are usually more carefully formulated than oral communications, so the messages conveyed tend to be more clearly stated. Written messages also can be retained as references or legal records.

There are some disadvantages to written communications. First, the writer often fails to carefully compose his thoughts and ideas. When a poorly prepared message has to be followed by many written or oral communications to clarify the writer's original written word, the real message becomes garbled and the process becomes costly and time-consuming.

Second, people tend to retain voluminous written documentation for use as a means of defense or attack. A file of such documentation is often referred to as a "Pearl Harbor file." The advantages of written information for legal purposes are usually obvious; however, there are occasions when such information is either duplicative or unnecessary. Effective managers recognize the importance of document retention and develop sensible procedures and practices for that purpose.

The most important question that you, as a manager—and writer—can ask yourself is, "Have I stated my message clearly?" If you are to be an effective writer, you must do a good job of informing the intended receiver of your message. There is nothing more important to you, if you wish to be an effective manager, than being informative and properly understood.

A message that is easy to understand is informative. This does not imply that it is "readable"; i.e., easy to read. In recent years there have been many presentations or articles on readability. These articles have offered some simple solutions to common writing problems, such as: use everyday words, short sentences and brief paragraphs; keep the "fog content" down; don't use complicated or foreign expressions, overworked phrases, and unfamiliar jargon. Compliance with this advice may appear to be quite simple but cannot be considered a panacea for all writing problems. Strict adherence to the advice in these articles does not ensure that your next staff paper or report will be informative. Informative writing involves paying proper attention to the choice of words, construction of sentences, and logical presentation of thoughts and ideas.

The meanings assigned to words have two characteristics—denotation and connotation. Denotation is the meaning or idea conveyed by the word through comon usage; connotation is the thought (personal or emotional) attributed to the word. "Democracy," for example, generally has a denotative meaning. From a connotative aspect, its meaning is much broader. In trying to communicate effectively—in writing as well as speaking—we risk being misunderstood. We can only hope to know the common meanings (the denotative characteristics) of most frequently used words. Unfortunately, this is not always a simple task. The uniqueness of a word should be known by

the writer when he chooses it to convey an idea. The importance of selecting the right word has been recognized since biblical times. In Proverbs 25:11, we find the statement that words fitly spoken (or written) are like "apples of gold in pictures of silver."

How to Proceed

Effective writing, based on adequate preparation, involves analyzing, selecting, and organizing ideas. This process establishes the foundation for all work that follows. At the outset, arrange the ideas in your mind. Then, follow the basic steps indicated below in preparing a proposal, report, staff paper, or article for publication.

—*Determine the basic purpose of the message*. Divide it into two elements: the general and specific purposes. The general purpose may be to direct, inform, question, or persuade. The specific purpose may be obvious or may require a great deal of thought. If you cannot define the specific purpose clearly, it will be difficult to transmit a clear message to the intended receiver. Always consider who will read, understand, and possibly respond to the message.

—*Collect and evaluate the facts and information needed*. Formulate the conclusions and/or recommendations in your mind and check them against the facts.

—*Organize and divide the material into principal topics*. Arrange the principal topics, with the subordinate topics, in a logical sequence. Examine the logic of the outline. Are closely associated topics properly grouped and sequenced? Should the outline be altered—simplified, reduced, extended?

—*Prepare the first draft using a conversational style*. Dictating the message may help to make the manuscript closely approximate a good conversation. Concentrate on one section of the message at a time; don't try to write the first draft and revise it at the same time. Set the draft aside for a while. Then, examine it from a fresh, critical point of view. Have you been objective and logical in your reasoning? Are there any possible fallacies in your reasoning? Have you said precisely what you intended? Does the draft include enough detail to satisfy the intended receiver? Does the text flow smoothly—in a clear, logical order?

—*Consider the intended receiver*. Have you kept his background in mind? Have you made the message personal to him? Does the message cover all of the bases?

—*Review the text*. Have you observed the commonly accepted practices for capitalizing, abbreviating, numbering, and punctuating? Have you carefully selected and used the right words?

Now, I would like to direct your attention to the preparation of written communication with which you, as a program or functional manager, must be concerned.

Written Communication

Written communication—perhaps an instruction—is an important management tool.

Major benefits are:

—Displays authority

—Usually more accurate than oral communication

—Verifiable

—Has a degree of permanence

—Makes accurate and speedy reproduction possible

—Has high retention rate.

Major drawbacks are:

—May not be all-embracing. With situation changes, communication may become outdated or counter-productive

—May not allow for reading ability of recipient

—Some slow feedback possible.

Let's consider preparation of the proposal.

The Proposal

Proposal preparation is important to managers. For success in any proposal effort, it is important to get to know your potential "customer." The value of personal contact cannot be overemphasized. Listen to what the potential customer says and be flexible in your objectives.

During proposal preparation, organize the work to be done, taking into account people involved and available resources. Develop a realistic schedule, considering the tasks to be accomplished.

Produce a winning proposal using the following steps:

—Develop a good outline, containing the following basics:

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Statement of Work
3.0 Review of Related Technology
4.0 Qualifications of the Investigator(s)
5.0 Resources and Facilities
6.0 Management of Project
7.0 Cost Estimate

—Review and revise outline

—Develop principal graphics

—Write proposal draft and have it reviewed

—Revise as appropriate

—Make final revisions and submit to customer.

Some ideas to consider in proposal preparation are: Always write from the customer's viewpoint; keep graphics to a minimum; recognize the customer cannot read your mind; never submit a blind proposal to a customer you don't know.

Next, let's consider preparation of a report.

The Report

The report deserves special attention. It is prepared to permanently record information or opinion on a given subject. It may be prepared periodically or to satisfy a specific requirement of higher management. It expresses the thoughts of the reporter and impresses the recipient.

The purpose of writing a report is to communicate results of an investigation or to identify progress made during a specific period of time. The report represents on paper some new knowledge gained. It conveys your accomplishments to the recipient. It should not be looked upon as simply a recording tool, but an action tool—a document frequently used by management in planning and decision-making.

Some common reports include:

—"Special" reports, satisfying a special management requirement

—Status (or progress) reports, surveying currency of a project—milestones, schedules and budget

—Meeting reports, summarizing meeting topics and noting decisions made on assigned tasks, etc.

The report writer often assumes report recipients have an interest in, and some knowledge of, the subject. As a result, reports often contain large amounts of jargon and "in" references. Unfortunately, if not associated closely with the subject report, the recipient may have difficulty reading or comprehending it. Therefore, when you prepare a report, it is important you know who the recipients are, if possible.

Do your reports usually have the impact they should? If not, to what do you attribute the problem? Is it the logic you used, or is it the report structure?

The conventional structure of a report is as follows:

1.0 Summary
2.0 Introduction
3.0 Discussion
4.0 Observations, Conclusions and/or Recommendations
Appendix

If you have prepared reports in this manner, and they have not received appropriate attention from recipients, perhaps a different format would accomplish this. If ground rules for report structure have not been established, consider structuring the next report as follows:

1.0 Highlights (executive summary)
2.0 Conclusions and/or Recommendations
3.0 Analysis of Details
4.0 Details
Appendix

The traditional "Summary" can be replaced with a single page behind the title page containing the report highlights, often identified as an executive summary. This page can address such items as the title, objective, a brief statement of the conclusions and recommendations, and, if applicable, advantages, disadvantages, and limitations. Such a highlights page forces you, the writer, to be concise in choice of words, and discriminating in selection of ideas. If the highlights page is used, the "Introduction," which normally presents background or historical material, may be eliminated. If it must appear in the report, do not include it as a monolithic block.

In the suggested change of format, the "Discussion" is eliminated and replaced by a detailed expansion of the conclusions and/or recommendations. Placing conclusions and recommendations at the beginning of the report will show the recipient at the outset whether the report contains information he wants.

Reports often go awry because they are prepared in the sequence followed in researching the subject matter. The traditional stepped-sequence used in research is as follows:

—Search for and collect the material/data

—Analyze the material/data collected and separate it into logical groupings or steps

—Develop conclusions

—Make recommendations.

The main ideas of the report—the "what" and "why"—are generally contained in the third and fourth steps. Therefore, as reports are

traditionally written, the receiver does not have a full grasp of the "what" and "why" until he reads the final pages, since the writer has forced the recipient to go through all of the research detail.

When you prepare your next report, place the conclusions and recommendations at the beginning. Then, follow with the analysis and details to reinforce your recommendations. The advantage is that the recipient learns what he wants to know immediately. The conclusions are more to the point. The advantage to you, as the writer, is that once the recipient has grasped the main ideas, and learned the reasons for them, he is forced to consider your point of view throughout the report. There is another advantage. When your conclusions are clearly drawn and stated at the outset, many of the traditional problems of report organization tend to disappear.

Polishing Process

The principal difference between a well-prepared proposal, report, or paper, and a poorly prepared one may be the amount of effort spent "polishing" it. This is often a tedious process, but even the best writers admit it is important and endure it.

The polishing process begins with reading the text from beginning to end. The first time through, check for content; the second time, for overall organization; the third time, for appropriateness; and the fourth time, for correctness. These checks are inseparable. Although it may be possible to separate one for the purpose of analysis, each depends upon the others. All combine to produce an effective message.

Content is of primary importance. If the message is not complete, the receiver will not understand the purpose and will not respond as you wish.

Organization is a quality you should look for and strive for in appraising the results of your written proposal, report or paper. The reason is simply this: a clear, logical organization of the manuscript leads to a better understanding of your message. To ensure you have accomplished this objective, the following three basic questions should be answered affirmatively:

—Have I used the best text pattern or organization to present my message—to make my point?

—Does my principal objective come through clearly?

—Are my transitions between ideas and major sections of the text logical? In other words, is there a natural, easy flow from one idea to the next?

Directness is another quality for concern. You can achieve directness in your proposal, report or paper by using simple, uncomplicated sentences, and by selecting words the receiver will understand effortlessly. You can improve the quality by varying word arrangements and length of sentences. An example or two—even an illustration—might help to explain a difficult point. As implied earlier, good writing is little different from good conversation. Write as you talk, but tighten it up a bit when you edit the text.

Appropriateness must also be considered. The general tone of your proposal, report or paper should suit the subject addressed. Consider the receiver in deciding on the tone, level, and style of your message.

Correctness is the final quality you should try to attain. This is probably the quality the reader will use most frequently to form his opinion of you. Although your message may possess the other qualities, the recipient will ignore your message if he believes it was prepared by an uneducated person. To successfully prepare proposals, reports and papers, you must abide by generally recognized standards—standards that determine correct usage of language. You must acquire a "feel for the language" just as a driver acquires a "feel for the road." To do so, you might read the text aloud. If you tend to stumble over a word or phrase, it could indicate the need for punctuation or rephrasing. Sometimes, you will find that a sentence doesn't hang together and should be divided into two or more separate statements. Ask yourself these additional questions:

—Are subjects and verbs in agreement?

—Is spelling correct?

—Is capitalizing correct?

—Did I avoid overcapitalizing?

—Did I select correct pronouns?

—Am I consistent in use of abbreviations and special terms?

—Can I eliminate a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or section of text without losing important data or continuity?

Measuring Efficiency

One way to measure efficiency of your written work is to use an instrument devised by Robert Gunning—The Fog Index. The Index is based upon a combination of two criteria: the average words per sentence and the percentage of foggy words; i.e., words of three or more syllables.

To determine the Fog Index, take a sample of at least 100 words, excluding capitalized words, titles and dates. Use the following steps:

1. Count words in sample
2. Count sentences
3. Divide sentence total into word total for average words per sentence
4. Count words of three or more syllables
5. Divide word total into total words of three or more syllables for percent of foggy words
6. Add results from steps 3 and 5
7. Multiply the sum in step 6 by 0.4. The result is the Fog Index.

Most people are comfortable when reading a document in which the Index is 12 or lower.

To improve writing efficiency, look for "sentence cloggers" identified below and reduce their numbers in your written material:

—Unnecessary words
—Pointless repetition
—Redundancy. Don't repeat words and ideas needlessly
—Broken sentences. Join sentences about the same subject. One longer sentence may carry more weight than two shorter ones
—Excess phrases
—Intensives. Recognize that many concepts are stronger if they aren't qualified
—Indirection. Don't hide behind indefinite language
—Masked verbs. Keep verbs unmasked and, for the most part, active
—Jargon. Don't use jargon because it may be difficult for all readers to understand.

Testing the Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a proposal, report or paper you have prepared can be judged by the answers to these questions:

—Is my writing complete, concise, clear, emphatic, appropriate in tone, correct?

—Have I used an approach that will arouse the interest of the intended receiver?

—Have I found a way to hold the receiver's interest?

—Have I determined what information I would like the receiver to remember after reading the document? (Note: When you have made this determination, emphasize the information by illustrating it and including it in the summary.)

If you have met the quality criteria described in the polishing process, measured the efficiency and can give an affirmative answer to each test question for effectiveness, you have prepared a proposal, report or paper to successfully accomplish the intended purpose.

Final Words

Speaking—not writing—is the natural act for all of us. Writing is hard work and, to be successful, it must be approached systematically. Remember,

When about to put your
words in ink,
'Twill do no harm to stop
and think.



I don't care how much a man talks, if he only says it in a few words.

—Josh Billings

IV

SPEAKING SKILLS

Thomas Mann believed that "speech is civilization itself."

Part of every program or functional manager's time is devoted to presentations. In this chapter, we will delve in some detail into how they can be given effectively.

Presentation Objective

Ralph C. Smedley once said, "A speech without a specific purpose is like a journey without a destination." The first step in preparing a presentation is to establish a purpose or an objective. What is to be accomplished by the presentation? After this has been determined, necessary steps can be taken to support it, and guidelines established to organize it. If the presentation is logically organized by subject matter at the start, it will do much to ensure success of the presentation.

A presentation is made to provide information, give instruction, sell a plan or idea, or accomplish a combination of these things. Through words and visual aids, a presentation performs a service to the listener. A carefully worded presentation can translate facts, trends, or statistics into basic relationships that will influence policy or actions. Rudyard Kipling said, "Words are the most powerful drug used by mankind."

After the objective of the presentation has been established, the general form of the presentation must be considered. The message should be communicated in as few words and using as few visual aids as necessary to present a plan or idea effectively. A concise, convincing, 10-minute presentation may accomplish readily the desired objective—and be more economical—than one lasting an hour. In other words, the effectiveness of the presentation depends more upon the soundness of the message than its length, the presenter's skill in delivery, or the quality of the visual aids. However, too long a presentation, lack of skill in its delivery, and/or poor visual aids could spell disaster.

Presentation Strategy

Once the objective has been established, the next step is planning the presentation strategy. The answers to some basic questions will help in this process: (1) What are you selling? (2) To whom are you selling it? (3) Against what are you competing? (4) In what environment do you expect the message to be received?

What are you selling? Why are you making the presentation? Take another look at the objective. Are you selling a plan of action, a need for action, a product, a service, or support for an idea? Pinpoint the reason for making the presentation. Express it in as few words as possible. John Witherspoon once said, "Never rise to speak until you have something to say, and when you have said it, cease."

To whom are you selling it? If you know your audience, you have some idea of its position on the subject. A presentation that is highly successful before one audience can be a failure before another one. The presentation strategy should be attuned to the audience. It may be an audience of "generalists" or "specialists" or a mix of the two. What do the people in the audience already know? What do they need to know? Can they make a final decision, or must they take your recommendations to a higher authority?

Before the presentation, know as much as possible about the people in your audience—their thought patterns, interests, authority, and even their emotional needs. Do they prefer a certain type of visual aid, a break during the presentation, or coffee service? Is their time limited? Remember, people in the audience will have different likes and dislikes. C. W. Spalding, writing in the Bardstown *Kentucky Standard* put it this way: "People differ. Some object to the fan dancer and others to the fan."

Against what are you competing? When you know the emotional needs of your audience, the message can be geared to the listener's viewpoint. The benefits to the listener can be targeted. In making presentations, the most common barriers encountered will be:

—Fear on the part of the listener that the plan or idea may curtail his prestige, authority, or prospects for advancement

—Unwillingness of the listener to undertake something new because it may involve an organizational dislocation or cause a personal irritation

—Unwillingness of the listener to leave the "beaten" path and/or a hesitancy to stick out his neck

—The vanity of the listener.

In what environment do you expect the message to be received? There are a number of questions that might be raised to determine the environment in which the presentation will be given. Some basic questions are:

—Will there be a friendly or hostile, sympathetic or unsympathetic audience?

—Will the audience be open- or close-minded?

—Will you have supporters or opposition?

—If there is opposition, will it hold a unified or divided opinion?

There are some other factors that tend to affect the success of the presentation, namely:

—When will the presentation be given: early in the morning, after lunch, just before the close of the workday or after dinner?

—Will the people in the audience be in a hurry?

—Are you "on the spot" for any reason?

—Do you have to save someone's face?

In the final anaylsis, the strategy you formulate as a presenter should be based upon a knowledge of what you are selling, to whom you are selling it, the barriers you will be encountering, and the atmosphere in which the presentation will be given.

Presentation Organization

A successful presentation contains more than good material and the most convincing arguments. It displays good organization of subject matter. The most forceful and persuasive presenter may fail to have a plan, idea, or information accepted by the audience if the message is not organized well.

The introduction and conclusion cannot be neglected. At the outset, the presentation should gain the interest of the audience and convey to the listeners what is to be covered. In the conclusion, the presenter should review the key points of the presentation and pinpoint the action to be taken, if any.

The body of the presentation, located between the introduction and the conclusion, contains the bulk of the message. It should be presented to the listener in a meaningful form. An outpouring of plans, ideas, or information without form or relationship will not hold the attention of any audience very long. To ensure the clarity of your message, you must consider its accuracy and acceptability.

Organization of the presentation involves fitting the parts into a coherent whole. The method depends upon the subject matter to be presented and the strategy to be used. Probably the most familiar form of presentation is the time-sequenced—chronological—approach. The problem-solution pattern is a logical choice for many "in-house" presentations. When there is a need to compare alternative solutions to a problem, the comparison-contrast approach is a good choice. In an informative presentation, a cause-effect technique might be used. When the purpose of the presentation is to clarify or explain the meaning or nature of something, the definition technique is appropriate. Another form commonly used involves discussing the "parts" comprising the whole, such as subdivision of an organization, or subsystem for components of a missile. Related to this technique is the presentation built around systems, functions, and qualities—subsystems of an aircraft, functions of units within an organization, or qualities of an "All American." If the material to be used does not fit into one of the commonly used organizing patterns, the presenter should establish a pattern of his own.

Normally, when you have an outstanding point to make in a presentation, it should be made at the beginning. This has an advantage over "building up" to the main point. If it "sells" the plan or idea, the balance of the presentation then involves "nailing down" the plan or idea. Another reason for leading off with the main point, or points,

is that important listeners could be called away before the presenter is finished. If they are, they will not miss the main point.

After a plan or an idea has been sold by citing its major advantage, or advantages, the balance of the presentation should generally be treated as reinforcement of that plan or idea. The points to be made should be presented in descending order of importance. Remember, when the main point fails to deliver the message, the lesser points will not do it! Speaking of ensuring the message comes through clearly, I am reminded of the 10-year-old explaining the plot of "My Fair Lady" to her younger sister. She said, "It's about a dirty girl who gets remedial reading."

A presentation should be long enough to accomplish the objective. Generally, a presentation of less than 1 hour is best. Most audiences don't absorb too many thoughts at a single sitting. Three or four important points can usually be established firmly. On some occasions, a half dozen points can be made if they are very closely related. Supplementary information should be screened from the subject matter before the presentation is made. Such material can be provided as a handout, if it is deemed important enough to convey to the audience.

At the end of the presentation, the audience should be left with a memorable impression of what you, as the presenter, said; accordingly, you should recap the main point or points. If you are expecting some action after the presentation, you should tell the people in the audience what you expect.

If you want to be a good speaker, rehearse your speech; practice what you preach. Once you have assembled and organized the presentation material, you should evaluate it, to include consideration of the factual content as well as the personal delivery. It is always possible that someone in the audience will assume a "so what?" attitude. Therefore, it is advisable to have a personally selected evaluator state what is clear, what is effective, and what should be reworked or eliminated. Undergoing such an evaluation by a friendly "so whatter" can be likened to seeing a dentist—not pleasant because it may reveal some trouble, but it could be dangerous not to do so.

The want of study and want of knowing what one is driving at must bear the blame of many long and weary presentations. Hence, a short talk is usually of better quality than a long one; if it is not, it is better that it is short. Perhaps you have heard the expression, "If a speaker can't strike oil in 30 minutes, he should stop boring."

There was a speaker who said, "Sorry if my speech seemed long, but I forgot my watch and I don't see a clock anywhere." A voice from the back of the auditorium responded, "There's a calendar on the wall right next to you."

Presentation Language

To speak well, you must grasp the function of language and be sensitive to the quality of words. For you as a speaker to grasp the function, you must consider what the results of your message will be. Words act on people. Thus, their impact on your audience is important to you.

As a speaker, you must be sensitive to quality. Most people recognize quality in language when

they encounter it, but there is no objective way to determine it. Quality, of course, does not mean language must be fancy. Indian Chief Joseph's declaration, "From here where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever," is an example of a quality statement.

The power of words was expressed well in a *Look* magazine editorial several years ago. Speaking of words, the editorial said:

> They sing. They hurt. They teach. They sanctify. They were man's first immeasurable feat of magic. They liberated us from ignorance and our barbarous past. For without marvelous scribbles which build letters into words, words into sentences, sentences into systems and sciences and creeds, man would be forever confined to the self-isolated prison of the cuttlefish or the chimpanzee."

If you understand the function of language and are sensitive to quality, you can turn your attention to the rules.

Tarver[1] set down 10 guidelines for speakers. His list is not exhaustive and the items on it are not mutually exclusive, but are worthy of consideration.

—Be simple. Lean toward conversational language.

—Be expansive. Often two-thirds of the content of the first draft can be discarded in favor of expanding the remainder into a fully developed expression of a limited topic.

—Be concrete. Specific terms limit a listener's chances to misunderstand.

—Be vivid. Appeal to the senses.

—Be personal. Use the personal pronoun.

—Be smooth. Develop an uncluttered rhythm. Avoid clauses that may interrupt the idea you are presenting.

—Be aggressive. Keep away from loaded words or qualify them with such expressions as "so called" or "self-styled."

—Be purposeful. Meaning is assigned to words by the listeners; therefore, your intent is less important than your listener's perception.

—Be eloquent. Occasionally, use a rhetorical device to enhance your expression of an idea. Sometimes a little light alliteration can be used.

—Be adaptable. Consider the audience and adapt your presentation to its needs.

Remember, you should develop a grasp of function and a sense of quality; then, adapt the rules set forth here to your presentation.

Presentation Delivery

Someone has said, "It's not *what* you say, but *how* you say it." To this you might add the thought, "...and *what* you are doing *when* you say it." These are the basic elements of a presentation.

At the outset of a presentation, you must establish rapport with the audience. There must be a flow of mutual understanding and respect. At the start, you should win the kind of attention needed for the rest of the presentation. Your walk, posture, eye contact, facial expressions, hand movements and clothing will be observed by the audience. Also, there is a vocal impact. If you speak at approximately 125-145 words per minute, you can hold their attention, provided you

use inflection—to give life to your words. The tone of your voice will reveal whether you believe in your subject. Early in the presentation, you will be judged. After the audience decides whether it likes you, it will determine whether it can give credence to what you have to say. One story goes that after giving what he considered a stirring, fact-filled campaign speech, the candidate looked at his audience and confidently asked, "Now, any questions?" "Yes," came a voice from the rear, "Who else is running?"

To be successful—assuming the message is good—you must be animated, alert, and free from obvious tensions. A simple, indirect, natural, and relaxed style will gain audience acceptance, as will use of variety in voice, body movements, and subject content. You must be intimately acquainted with the principal points and the sequence in which they are to be given, so rehearsals are a must. If you want to "look alive" to the audience, you must know the subject, have an intense belief in the subject, confidence in your ability to communicate a demeanor that fits the occasion, good enunciation and an eagerness to communicate effectively.

Regarding applause, the late Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once said:

> Applause before a speaker starts shows faith.
> Applause during the speech indicates there is some hope the speech will get better.
> Applause at the end of the speech is an act of appeasement.

Presentation Aids

When you feel words alone will fail to present the message clearly, presentation aids become an important part of the delivery. Such aids can help isolate ideas and clarify problems or relationships. They can also be very helpful when figures are involved or trends have to be conveyed.

Depending on the resources of your organization and your lead time, you may be able to add highlights and gain more interest in your presentations through the using aids (that help to deliver) your message in an appropriate manner. Among the aids available for use in presentations are the following:

Visual Aids

—Handouts
—Flipcharts
—Chalkboard
—Magnetic Board
—Electronic blackboard
—Overhead projector with transparencies
—Opaque projector with regular paper
—Slide projector with slides
—Silent motion pictures and projector
—Three dimensional models
—Computer terminal, with or without graphics support

Audio Aids

—Tape and player
—Record and phonograph

Audiovisual Aids

—Videotape cassette and player
—Synthesized sound-slide filmstrip and player
—16mm sound film and projector.

Although presentation aids can help a well-prepared oral presentation, don't get "caught up" in the sophistication of the aids. Aids are tools to use, not crutches. They

should never become the presentation. Furthermore, there are potential catastrophes associated with the use of aids. If one of the aids fails, you must be able to continue without losing impact. Therefore, before considering the use of any aids, carefully consider the problems you may encounter. In many cases, the audience can grasp a plan, idea or situation more quickly than when the message is conveyed verbally, without benefit of aids. So when words will suffice, presentation aids should not be used. Dallas Wiiliams questions whether one picture is worth a thousand words as has been sometimes stated. Williams says:

> ...Give me 1000 words and I can have the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm, the Hippocratic Oath, a sonnet by Shakespeare, the Preamble to the Constitution, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and enough left over for just about all of the Boy Scout Oath—and I wouldn't trade them to you for any picture on earth.

Unfortunately, you can't put all of these immortal words together to convey a single coherent message. Therefore, carefully planned presentation aids are often helpful and effective in conveying messages to a variety of audiences.

Teleprompters

Use of teleprompters in speeches given before large audiences is gaining wide acceptance. Today, there are two types of teleprompters. The older mechanical teleprompter utilizes a paper roll that slowly unwinds and reveals the script. This type of teleprompter can be placed on a stand that is convenient to the speaker, or attached directly to a camera (if the presentation is being televised). The disadvantage of this kind of teleprompter is that the speaker can never look directly into the camera lens and establish direct contact with the audience.

The latest teleprompters use a two-way mirror. The image of the script is reflected off one side of a pane of glass, while the television camera shoots directly through the other side of the glass. Thus, the speaker is looking at the audience (into the camera lens) and establishing direct contact.

The technician controls the pace of the prompter with the rate of delivery of the speaker. The speaker can depart from the prepared script and the prompter will wait until the speaker returns to the prepared copy before continuing.

This presentation technique, used regularly by the President of the United States, and other high-ranking officials, is very effective, but it takes some practice to get use to it.

Some Final Thoughts

The cost of a presentation should be justified, unless the presentation has been directed by higher authority and no alternative is possible. If it has not been specifically directed, the cost of preparing and delivering a presentation must be weighed against the value of the objective to be accomplished. The cost of the time required of the listeners also should be considered.

In weighing alternatives, one might ask, "Can the story be told more economically—and, possibly,

as effectively—by an interoffice/interagency memo, letter, meeting in the office, or a telephone call?

Let's run down the list of things that you, the presenter, should remember when you face the audience:

—Keep your presentation simple and brief. Use plain language. Don't use cliches.

—Rehearse a presentation. Also, don't eat a heavy meal.

—Speak clearly; make yourself heard.

—Speak at an even rate of speed and use your tone of voice to highlight and accent your thoughts.

—Keep your back to the wall.

—Avoid any mention of time during opening comments.

—Watch the faces of those in your audience. Maintain "eye-to-eye" contact. It builds credibility in communication.

—Stand erect and control your nervous habits. Don't slouch, lean on the lectern, fuss with your clothes or use annoying gestures.

—Use pauses for effect. A brief silence can be very effective and rivet straying attention.

—Avoid competing with outside disturbances.

—Relax and smile. Avoid smoking, if possible.

—If you have presentation aids, use them wisely. Don't use too many statistics.

—Use stories to make your points.

—Avoid jargon. It doesn't work as well in a speech as it does in writing.

—Reaffirm your points at the end of the presentation.

—If questions are permitted, let your audience know early in the presentation. Discourage irrelevant and disruptive questions.

—When you have finished, make sure it is obvious.

Remember this, regarding the total impact of your presentation: Visual contact such as eye contact, facial expression, body language, and clothing account for about 55 percent; the tone of your voice accounts for about 38 percent; the context or words themselves account for only 7 percent.

Now, you should be ready to prepare for and speak effectively. Best wishes for success in the next one.

Endnotes

1. Jerry Tarver, "Can't Nobody Here Use This Language?" delivered to Connecticut Association of Professional Communicators, Hartford, Conn., February 21, 1979.



Seeing is believing.

—Anonymous

V

AUDIO AND VIDEO PRESENTATION SKILLS

In recent years, more communications of an informational nature have been transmitted by audio recordings and videotapes. The latter soon may dominate the information media in government, industry and education. It provides a way to send a televised message at a relatively low cost to groups in offices, industry, schools, colleges and universities. One growing area is medical television.

You should recognize from the start that the medium affects message impact. What takes place on an audiotape or videotape is being judged by the same standards as those for first-class radio presentations or prime-time television. The audience is sophisticated. On a videotape, the audience won't tolerate someone sitting quietly behind a desk looking and speaking into a camera. The audience expects more and will have to receive more if the speaker(s) wants undivided attention.

The recording technique is *not* more important than the information presented. The primary purpose is to communicate specific information. We don't excuse a poor presentation when it is neither interesting nor entertaining.

To make an effective presentation in your field of expertise, be it from a platform for a live audience or before subordinates, superiors, visitors or students, you must know the rules of the game. You must learn what does and what does not work well. When you are asked to make an audiotape or videotape, it may be a new "ball field" for you. Many techniques you may have learned to master on stage are applicable but there are new ones to learn if your presentation is to be first-rate.

Things to Consider at Outset

Speaking before a live audience, you communicate through more than one channel. Words selected and their sequence constitute the primary message. The secondary channel(s) through which you communicate concerns how you present the primary message; i.e., how you use voice and body to deliver ideas and supporting material.

In an audiotaping or videotaping there is a similarity in that your words and their sequencing, and your voice, are important. In video presentations, vocal delivery must be accompanied by effective body language and good eye contact (or contact with the eye of the camera).

In either medium, vocal loudness or softness must always be considered. So must vocal speed, which impacts upon audience interest and understanding. Generally, avoid a machine-gun rate of vocal delivery, except for a dramatic effect.

Everyone has a normal pitch range; some are high, some are low. An effective speaker varies pitch range to match intensity of the primary message.

When seen on a videotape, you probably express more non-verbal messages through facial muscles and eyes than through any other part of your body. In fact, you generally express feelings and awareness by your facial expressions in daily conversation. Thus, it is important to understand that facial expressions produce secondary messages that reinforce, or detract from, ideas you want to express.

When videotaping, your body movement is very important. Movements and gestures can add or detract from what you say. Random or repetitive body movements distract viewers' attention from your primary message. At the outset, you should know how you plan to start your presentation. If you hesitate, appear frightened, or spend too much time arranging materials, you will not make a positive first impression.

Before getting involved in details of an audiotape or videotape presentation, there are points needing attention.

—Select a topic you know, preferably one you know a lot about. Chances of success are greater if you feel comfortable with your subject.

—Determine at the outset who the audience will be because your message should be audience-centered. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have an effective message when you don't have a target audience in mind. When you know your audience, you are ready to begin preparing the message.

—Before starting, outline the message. Identify important points, issues to raise, arguments to support the message, and the final conclusion. Keep on target.

Audio Recording

Audio recording is widely used to impart information, but since telling is involved and the audience cannot interrupt to ask questions, interaction normally occurs after the recorded presentation. Interaction may be limited to questioning the person playing the recording, and that person may not have initiated the recording.

Rarely does the recording person speak extemporaneously; usually, there is a detailed set of notes or prompts. Sometimes the speaker may read word-for-word from a prepared script. If you are making a recording, allow time for detailed planning and preparation before recording a message using any of these techniques.

Most lectures are illustrated. This is not possible with an audio recording although illustrative material may be available with the recording. If

not, the person making the recording must use all resources (good stories and illustrative examples, effective voice inflections, dramatic pauses, and other techniques) to hold the interest of the listening audience.

An audio recording has these advantages.

—The recording can cover much material in a short time.

—The recording can be used for beginning and advanced audiences (learners), provided they are motivated.

—The recording can be used by different size groups, provided the recording can be clearly heard.

—The speaker recording has complete control of the content and sequencing of information, and is not interrupted by the audience.

Disadvantages of an audio recording are these.

—The message involves one-way communication. There is little or no way to check that the information was clearly transmitted or ideas were clearly understood.

—The audience is largely passive because there is essentially no participation and involvement.

—The attention of the audience may have to be maintained for a long time. This may be difficult.

--An audio presentation may be difficult or inappropriate for practical subjects, like the acquisition of skills.

Audio recordings should be used with discretion. Long presentations are difficult to sustain. Short ones can be very successful, even if the speaker is not skilled. Always, the speaker must have credibility with the audience.

Finally, it is important to recognize that when an audio recording is used, the speaker on the recording must be introduced properly. Do not skimp on the introduction to allow more time for the recorded presentation. Before the recording is played, it is imperative that the audience appreciate the speaker's qualification to address the audience on the subject chosen.

Videotaping

The discussion regarding audio recording applies to videotaping, but there are more things to consider. These are set forth in the following paragraphs.

On video, a neophyte should not attempt to imitate a professional orator admired for smooth delivery. It is a dangerous game to play and usually appears artificial to the audience.

The most important rule is to "be yourself." There is no distance between audience and speaker, no place to hide, and there is no way for the speaker to conceal uneasiness. The advice to "be yourself" and forget you are being televised may be oversimplification. There is nothing natural about the studio or stage setting of cameras, lights and restrictions. However, after becoming familiar with this environment, you may grow accustomed to it and be effective.

If you are inexperienced with videotaping, here are suggestions you may find helpful.

—*Use a Script*. Read it and don't depart from it. The disadvantage of reading the script is that the audience cannot see your facial expressions and measure your sincerity and enthusiasm. Using a

teleprompter or cue cards (a.k.a. idiot cards) can be helpful.

—*Rehearse*. Conduct enough rehearsals to ensure a smooth delivery. If you must read the script, don't hide the fact. It is better to use a key-word or key-phrase outline to keep on track. It is always more believable to paraphrase, or speak extemporaneously, than to read a script or recite something from memory.

—*Practice Timing*. This must be worked out and rehearsed in advance. Remember that timing is important but audience attention is more important.

—*Speak Distinctly*. A key consideration is voice quality regarding articulation, tone and pace. The voice should have a natural flow, a conversational style and be accompanied by natural gestures and movements.

—*Remember, Video Is a Visual Medium*. It is not necessary to maintain a constant flood of words to capture attention. A simple movement like walking across the stage or to a blackboard is attention-holding. Looking from the camera to one's notes, to pick up the next thought, grabs viewer attention. The audience will be patient and wait for words when they see what is taking place.

—*Be Subtle*. Use small gestures (not broad ones), a frown, or a quizzical expression, all of which communicate directly. Avoid hand motions near the face.

—*Consider Attire*. On a videotape, contrasts in color and value "bloom" and detract from the presenter. Solid colors are best. If two or more people are involved, they should wear grey or dark clothing to avoid unpleasant contrasts of color or design. Light colors attract more attention than dark ones and tend to distract attention from the speaker's face. Women's jewelry often reflects studio lights and causes sharp, distracting highlights in the video picture.

—*Stay Calm*. If you make an error, or wish to rephrase, continue the presentation and don't panic. Try to verbally correct the error if possible, but you may have to continue the presentation and take corrective action later.

Graphic Materials

Graphic materials convey information and add to presentation effectiveness. Graphic materials include visual materials from the settings where the action is staged to simple captions identifying a speaker on the important message points. Each visual element must contribute to the message and elements selected for aesthetic, functional, practical, and/or expositional purposes require consideration. Good graphics are simple graphics.

Closing Thoughts

I have concentrated on audio and visual techniques to make effective presentations. Selecting the appropriate method depends upon many factors. In making the final choice, a most important factor is understanding needs of the audience; another is your personal preference for the best media to use. The nature of the task may tend to influence whether to make an audio or video presentation, but the final decision is not always up to you. When you are the presenter providing information to an audience, my suggestions are appropriate to consider for a live audience or for

making an audiotape or videotape in a studio. The audience and the message must receive primary considerations. Don't forget that the message may get lost if you become too involved in "staging" the presentation.

Remember the words of Hugh Henry Breckenridge, who said, "In order to speak short on any subject, think long."



There's a language in her eye,
her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks.
Her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive
of her body.

—William Shakespeare

VI

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When Demosthenes was asked what was the first part of oratory, he answered, "action"; and which was the second, he replied, "action"; and which was third, he still answered, "action." People tend to believe actions more than words!

Have you ever heard anyone say, "His actions spoke so loudly I couldn't hear what he said?" Have you ever wondered whether anyone has said this about you? What we do is a means of communication, subject to interpretation by others. Did you ever stop to think that even failure to act is a way of communicating?

Today, many researchers are concerned with the information sent by communication that is independent of and different from verbal information; namely, non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is organized by language; non-verbal communication is not.

Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another. Most of us spend about 75 percent of our waking hours communicating our knowledge, thoughts, and ideas to others. However, most of us fail to realize that a great deal of our communication is non-verbal as opposed to oral and written. Non-verbal communication includes facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, body posture and motions, physical contact, and positioning within groups (distance and proximity). It may also include the way we wear our clothes or the silence we keep.

In person-to-person communication, our messages are sent on two levels simultaneously. If non-verbal cues and the spoken message are incongruous, the flow of communication is hindered. Right or wrong, the receiver of the communication tends to base the intention of the sender on the non-verbal cues he receives.

Categories and Features

G. W. Porter divides non-verbal communication into four broad categories:

Physical. This is the personal type of communication. It includes facial expressions, tone of voice, sense of touch, sense of smell, and body motions.

Aesthetic. This is the type of communication that takes place through creative expressions: playing instrumental music, dancing, painting and sculpturing.

Signs. This is the mechanical type of communication, which includes the use of signal flags, the 21-gun salute, horns, and sirens.

Symbolic. This is the type of communication that makes use of religious, status, or ego-building symbols.[1]

Our concern here will be with what Porter has called the physical method of non-verbal communication.

Knowledge of non-verbal communication is important to program managers and functional managers, who serve as leaders of organizational "teams," for at least two reasons:

—To function effectively as a team leader, the manager must interact with the other members successfully. Non-verbal cues, when interpreted correctly, provide him with one means to do so.

—Team members project attitudes and feelings through non-verbal communication. Some personal needs such as approval, growth, achievement, and recognition may be met in effective teams. The extent to which these needs are met is closely related to how perceptive the team leader and team members are to non-verbal communication in themselves and in others on the team.

If team members show a true awareness to non-verbal cues, the organization will have a better chance to succeed, for it will be an open, honest, and confronting unit.

Argyle and his associates have been studying the features of non-verbal communication that provide information to managers and their team members. The following summarizes their findings:

Static Features

Orientation. People may present themselves in various ways: face-to-face, side-to-side, or even back-to-back. For example, cooperating people are likely to sit side-by-side while competitors frequently face one another.

Distance. The distance one stands from another frequently conveys a non-verbal message. In some cultures it is a sign of attraction, while in others it may reflect status or the intensity of the exchange.

Posture. Obviously one can be lying down, seated, or standing. These are not the elements of posture that convey messages. Are we slouched or erect? Are our legs crossed or our arms folded? Such postures convey a degree of formality and the degree of relaxation in the communication exchange.

Physical Contact. Shaking hands, touching, holding, embracing, pushing, or patting on the back all convey messages. They reflect an element of intimacy or a feeling of (or lack of) attraction.

Dynamic Features

Facial Expressions. A smile, frown, raised eyebrow, yawn, and sneer all convey information. Facial expressions continually change during interaction and are monitored

constantly by the recipient. There is evidence that the meaning of these expressions may be similar across cultures.

Eye Contact. A major feature of social communication is eye contact. It can convey emotion, signal when to talk or finish, or aversion. The frequency of contact may suggest either interest or boredom.[2]

Gestures. You may not intend to send a message with every gesture, but you cannot avoid someone observing your movements and forming a message from them. Some of the most frequently observed, but least understood messages come from hand movements. Most people use hand movements regularly when talking. While some gestures (e.g., a clenched fist) have universal meanings, most of the others are individually learned and idiosyncratic.

The above discussion indicated that static features and dynamic features transmit important information from the sender to the receiver.

One additional comment is appropriate. Most non-verbal communication is a result of unconscious intent. Consequently, it may be the best cue as to how someone feels.

Tortoriello, Blott, and DeWine have defined non-verbal communication as:

> ...the exchange of messages primarily through non-linguistic means, including: kinesics (body language), facial expressions and eye contact, tactile communication, space and territory, environment, paralanguage (vocal but non-linguistic cues), and the use of silence and time."[3]

Let's review these non-linguistic ways of exchanging messages in more detail.

Kinesic

Kinesic comes from the Greek and means "movement." Accordingly, kinesic is the study of communication through body movement. It provides managers with a powerful technique to use in reaching personnel and organizational objectives. In many cases, awareness of kinesic can be a decisive advantage to a manager.

Preston indicates that different body movements or postures "have different meanings to different people at different times."[4] Therefore, rather than look for absolutes, you should develop an appreciation for the kinesic patterns. For example, observe whether your boss or another employee uses a particular combination of gestures, expressions, or postures each time he is in the same situation. If he does, you can generalize meanings that will help you analyze his behavior. Learn to spot your own kinesic patterns, too, and try to determine whether others are reading you correctly. For instance, do you give others clear signals, or misleading, false, or even conflicting signals? If you are not being read correctly, it is time to take some remedial action.

Lamb agrees with Preston. He believes the best way to access an executive's managerial potential is not to listen to what he says, but observe what he does when he is saying it.[5] He calls this new behavioral science "movement analysis." Some of the movements and gestures he has analyzed follow:

Forward and Backward Movements. If you extend a hand straight forward during an interview or tend to lean forward, Lamb considers you to be an "operator"—good for an organization requiring an infusion of energy or dramatic change of course.

Vertical Movements. If you tend to draw yourself up to your tallest during the handshake. Lamb considers you to be a "presenter." You are a master at selling yourself or the organization in which you are employed.

Side-to-Side Movements. If you take a lot of space while talking by moving your arms about, you are a good informer and good listener. You are best suited for an organization seeking a better sense of direction.

Lamb believes there is a relationship between positioning of the body and movements of the limbs and facial expressions. He has observed harmony between the two. On the other hand, if certain gestures are rehearsed, such as those made to impress others, there is a tendency to separate the posture and the movements. The harmony disappears.

Studies by Lamb also indicate that communication comes about through our degree of body flexibility. If you begin a movement with considerable force and then decelerate, you are considered a "gentle-touch." By contrast, if you are a "pressurizer," you are firm from beginning to end.

The accuracy of Lamb's analyses is not fully known. However, it is important that corporation executives are becoming so sensitive to the importance of non-verbal messages that they are hiring consultants, such as Lamb, to analyze non-verbal communications in their organizations.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions communicate emotions. They reveal the attitude of the communicator. Researchers have discovered that facial expressions reveal our emotional state. For example, the eyes tend to reveal happiness or sadness, and even surprise. A smile reveals a happy tone. It communicates friendliness and cooperation. A frown or set jaw reveals displeasure or disapproval.

Mehrabian believes verbal cues provide 7 percent of the meaning of the message; vocal cues, 38 percent; and facial expressions, 55 percent.[6] This means that, as the receiver of a message, you can rely heavily on the facial expressions of the sender because his expressions are a better indicator of the meaning behind the message than his words.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is a direct and powerful form of non-verbal communication. The superior in the organization generally maintains eye contact longer than the subordinate. The direct stare of the sender of the message conveys candor and openness. It elicits a feeling of trust. Downward glances are generally associated with modesty. Eyes rolled upward are associated with fatigue.

Tactile Communication

Communication through touch is obviously non-verbal. Used properly it can create a more direct message than dozens of words; used improperly it can build barriers and cause mistrust. You can

easily invade someone's space through this type of communication. If it is used reciprocally, it indicates solidarity; if not used reciprocally, it tends to indicate differences in status. Touch not only facilitates the sending of the message, but the emotional impact of the message as well.

Many conflicting messages occur through physical contact (touch).

The handshake is the most acceptable form of contact between two people. The normal form is a firm grip and a few "shakes" before breaking. If your grip is too strong, or too weak, you may create an unfavorable impression. A two-handed shake (where the left hand covers the gripped hand) indicates sincerity. Handshakes are appropriate in many situations: greeting, departure, congratulations, agreement, and friendship. If you refuse to shake hands, you may be considered rude or ill-mannered.

Physical contact in business, such as an arm around the waist or the shoulders, carries a "relationship" overtone. It is unacceptable and offensive to many people. As a manager, be aware as to whether your usual messages through physical contact have an adverse effect on your verbal messages and on your relationship with other employees. Some people are "touchers" and they like such contact. Other people are not touchers and resent such an intrusion by a manager. How do you react?

Personal Space

Personal space is your "bubble"--the space you place between yourself and others. This invisible boundary becomes apparent only when someone bumps or tries to enter your bubble.

How you identify your personal space and use the environment in which you find yourself influences your ability to send or receive messages. How close do you stand to the one with whom you are communicating? Where do you sit in the room? How do you position yourself with respect to others at a meeting? All of these things affect your level of comfort, and the level of comfort of those receiving your message.

Goldhaber says there are three basic principles that summarize the use of personal space in an organization: The higher your position (status) in the organization, (a) the more and better space you will have, (b) the better protected your territory will be, and (c) the easier it will be to invade the territory of lower-status personnel.[7]

The impact of use of space on the communication process is related directly to the environment in which the space is maintained.

Environment

How do you arrange the objects in your environment—the desks, chairs, tables, and bookcases? The design of your office, according to researchers, can greatly affect the communications within it. Some managers divide their offices into personal and impersonal areas. This can improve the communication process if the areas are used for the purposes intended.

Your pecking-order in the organization is frequently determined by such things as the size of your desk, square feet in your office, number of windows in the office, quality of the carpet, and type of paintings (original or copies) on the wall.

It is obvious that your personal space and environment affect the level of your comfort and status and facilitate or hinder the communication process.

Paralanguage

Is the content of your message contradicted by the attitude with which you are communicating it? Researchers have found that the tone, pitch, quality of voice, and rate of speaking convey emotions that can be judged accurately regardless of the message content. The important thing to gain from this is that the voice is important, not just as the conveyor of the message, but as a complement to the message. As a communicator, you should be sensitive to the influence of tone, pitch, and quality of your voice on the interpretation of your message by the receiver.

Silence and Time

Silence can be a positive or negative influence in the communications process. It can provide a link between messages or sever relationships. It can create tension and uneasiness or create a peaceful situation. Silence can also be judgmental by indicating favor or disfavor—agreement or disagreement.

For example, suppose a program manager finds a couple of his staff members resting.

—If he believes these staff members are basically lazy, the idleness conveys to him that they are "goofing off" and should be given additional assignments.

—If he believes these staff members are self-motivated and good workers, the idleness conveys to him that they are taking a well-deserved "break."

—If he is personally insecure, the idleness conveys to him that they are threatening his authority.

Time can be an indicator of status. How long will you give the staff member who wishes to speak to you? How long will you make him wait to see you? Do you maintain a schedule? Is your schedule such that your subordinates must arrange their schedules to suit yours? In a healthy organization, the manager and his subordinates use time to communicate their mutual respect to each other.

Image Transmits Message

Lastly, a non-verbal message is transmitted by appearance (the way you dress). The key to business dress is understatement. Dress should convey professionalism and competency to complement your overall message of effectiveness.

The basic dress (the clothes you wear) should fit your personal body type. Your dress causes reactions in other people's behavior. When you express yourself non-verbally in a non-conforming manner of dress in an attempt to be different, you may cause an adverse reaction in others.

The way you dress and groom influences others' attitudes toward you. Most managers are aware of dress codes. Some managers are strict about them; some are not. Although the codes are seldom put in writing, managers often set them by implication.

The image you can convey, or want to convey to your superior, can be bolstered or weakened by your choice of clothing—style, color and pattern, or combinations used to present your image. Preston believes if you make the right choices, promising new vistas may

emerge, but if you make the wrong ones, nagging questions may haunt you for years.[8]

Some key choices in clothing are color and style. Personal taste may dictate the colors and styles you choose to wear. However, by the time you could buy your own clothes, you probably had established the image you wanted to convey. The colors and styles of dress had become the characteristics of your appearance.

The most important consideration in selecting clothing is to choose clothes that will make you comfortable in the circles in which you move. You will be uncomfortable if you don't blend with the people in your organization or in your community. Accordingly, you may seem insecure or on the offensive.

It is worthwhile to recognize that the reaction of other people toward you depends, to some degree, on the image that you communicate to them through the way you dress. Trollope wrote, "I hold that gentlemen to be best dressed whose dress no one observes."[9]

Closing Thoughts

Regardless of your position in the organization—program manager, functional manager, or staff member—it is important you develop some sensitivity to non-verbal messages. Cooperation improves as we recognize and respond appropriately to non-verbal cues.

Of course you have been aware of non-verbal communication all of your life, but how much thought have you given it? If the author of this book has been able to communicate effectively with you, you will be better able to identify and understand some of the non-verbal cues you transmit and receive daily and one facet of your skill in communication, then, will be enhanced.

Endnotes

1. George W. Porter, "Non-Verbal Communications," *Training and Development Journal* 23 (June 1969): 3-8.

2. M. Argyle, "Nonverbal Communication in Human Social Interaction," In R. Hinde (Ed.), *Non-verbal Communication* (New York: Cambridge, 1972).

3. Thomas P. Tortoriello, Stephen J. Blatt, and Sue DeWine, *Communication in the Organization* (New York. McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), p. 115.

4. Paul Preston, *Communication for Managers*(Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentiss-Hall, Inc., 1979).

5. Warren Lamb, a London-based consultant.

6. A. Mehrabian, *Silent Messages* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1971), p. 43.

7. Gerald M. Goldhaber, *Organizational Communication* (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown, 1974), p. 150.

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9. Anthony Trollope, Thackeray, Chapter IX.



The true art of memory is the art of attention.

—Johnson

VII

LISTENING SKILLS

Most of us are acquainted with the old riddle that goes: If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is in the area to hear it, does it make a noise? From a communication point of view, the answer must be a definite "No." Even though there are sound waves, there is no sound because no one perceives it. For communication to take place, there must be both a sender and a receiver. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of this book were focused on the sender; this chapter is focused on the receiver—the one who provides feedback to the sender.

Saul Gellerman said:

> The sender, to be certain that his message will be accepted by the receiver, must be prepared to let the receiver influence him. He must even be prepared to let the receiver alter or modify the message in ways that make it more acceptable to the receiver. Otherwise, it may not be understood or it may not be accepted, or it may simply be given lip service and ignored.[1]

This places the responsibility for good communication squarely on the shoulders of *both* the sender and the receiver. Each of us plays the roles of sender and receiver many times each day. Thus, it is important to learn to play each role well.

Frank Tyger says, "all wise men share one trait in common: the ability to listen." Therefore, it is interesting to note that the average individual spends considerably more time each day in listening than in writing, speaking or reading. Listening is a very important communication skill.

We devote about 45 percent of our working hours to listening. If you have not taken steps to improve this skill, you listen at only 25 percent efficiency. Putting these thoughts together, do you feel comfortable knowing that you earn 40 percent or more of your pay while listening at 25 percent efficiency? If not, perhaps acting on the information imparted in this chapter will improve your listening skills to above the average in listening efficiency. Tests have shown that we

can significantly raise the level of our listening performance by a small amount of study and practice.

The importance of the listening skill to managers has been recognized by industrial firms for some time. Dr. Earl Planty, in his role as executive counselor at Johnson & Johnson, said:

> By far the most effective method by which executives can tap ideas of subordinates is sympathetic listening in the many day-to-day informal contacts within and outside the work place. There is no system that will do the job in an easier manner....Nothing can equal an executive's willingness to listen.

Recognizing the value of effective listening, many companies offer training programs to improve this communication skill. Some years ago, the Methods Engineering Council compared one group of participants in a preliminary discussion on efficiency in listening with a second group not participating in such a discussion. The comparison was made by testing each group. The test results showed the marks made by the first group were 15 percent higher—a significant improvement!

Wilson Mizner found that "a good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something."

What Listening Is

We hear—often without listening—when sound waves strike our eardrums. When we don't remember what we have heard, it is probably because we did not listen. A good example is the situation that frequently occurs when we are introduced to a new employee or a new acquaintance. A few minutes later we can't recall the person's name. Why? Because we probably failed to listen to the name when we were introduced.

Johnson defines listening as "the ability to understand and respond effectively to oral communication."[2] Thus, we can state at the outset that hearing is not listening. Listening requires more than hearing; it requires understanding the communication received. Davis states it this way: "Hearing is with the ears, but listening is with the mind."[3]

Some attributes of a good listener are as follows:

—Usually makes better decisions because the inputs he receives are better

—Learns more in a given period of time, thereby saving time

—Encourages others to listen to what he says because he appears more attentive and better mannered.

The typical listener, after 2 weeks, can remember only 25 percent of what he has heard in a briefing or a speech. Therefore, listening is not effective for receipt and retention of factual details. For retention of factual details we must place our dependence on the written word.

Researchers have discovered that we can improve our listening comprehension about 25 percent. Most of us process the sender's words so fast that there is idle time for us to think about the message while it is being given. During this idle time, a good listener ponders the sender's objectives, weighs the evidence being presented and

searches for ways to better understand the message. It follows that good listening can be considered "a conscious, positive act requiring willpower."[4]

The ability to listen more effectively may be acquired through discipline and practice. As a listener, you should physically and mentally prepare yourself for the communication. You must be physically relaxed and mentally alert to receive and understand the message. Effective listening requires sustained concentration (regardless of the length of the message), attention to the main ideas presented, notetaking (if the conditions are appropriate), and no emotional blocks to the message by the listener. You cannot listen passively and expect to retain the message. If you want to be an effective listener, you must give the communicator of the message sufficient attention and make an effort to understand his viewpoint.

Guides to Effective Listening

Here are some practical suggestions for effective listening which, if followed in the program office or the functional organization, can appreciably increase the effectiveness of this communication skill.

—*Realize that listening is hard work.* It is characterized by faster heart action, quicker blood circulation, and a small rise in body temperature. Researchers have found that the higher we climb on the organizational ladder, the more difficult listening becomes. In day-to-day conversations, show the communicator you are interested by looking and acting like you are.

—*Prepare to listen.* Stop talking! You can't listen if you are talking. Establish the correct mental attitude. In your daily communication, establish a permissive environment for each communicator.

—*Recognize your own biases.* The words you hear pass through your perceptual filter. This filter is your personal frame of reference. Learn what your biases are and make adjustments for them. Keep your biases from interfering with the message.

—*Resist distractions.* Look at the person who is speaking. Adjust quickly to any kind of abnormal situation. Poor listeners tolerate bad conditions and, in some instances, may create distractions themselves. Take a clue from good listeners: look and act interested.

—*Keep an open mind.* A good listener doesn't feel threatened or insulted, or need to resist messages that contradict his beliefs, attitudes, ideas, or personal values. Try to identify and rationalize the words or phrases most upsetting to your emotions.

—*Find an area of interest.* Good listeners are interested and attentive. They find ways to make the message relevant to themselves and/or their jobs. Make your listening efficient by asking yourself: "What is he saying that I can use? Does he have any worthwhile ideas? Is he conveying any workable approaches or solutions?" G. K. Chesterton once said, "There is no such thing as an uninteresting subject; there are only uninteresting people."

—*Acknowledge the speaker.*. Nod your head or in some way let the speaker know he has your attention.

—*Show some empathy.* If you show some empathy, you create a climate

that encourages others to communicate honestly and openly. Try to see the communicator's point of view; suspend your emotions and judgment temporarily. Soak up the information being presented without bias.

—*Hold your fire.* Be patient. Don't interrupt. Let the speaker finish a thought completely before breaking in. Don't become overstimulated, too excited or excited too soon by what the speaker says. Be sure you understand what the speaker means; that is, withhold your evaluation until your comprehension is complete. Mentally arguing with a communicator is one of the principal reasons so little listening takes place in some discussions. Don't argue. If you win, you lose.

—*Listen critically and delay judgment.* Good listeners delay making a judgment about the communicator's personality, the principal points of the message and the response. Ask questions and listen critically to the answers. Then, at the appropriate time, judgment can be passed in an enlightened manner.

—*Judge content, not delivery.* We listen with our own experience. We do not understand everything we hear. It is not fair to hold the communicator responsible if we can't decode his message. One way to raise the level of your understanding is to recognize and assume your own responsibility. Ask the speaker to be more specific or explain something you don't understand.

—*Exercise your mind but don't let it wander.* Good listeners develop an appetite for hearing a variety of presentations—presentations difficult enough to challenge their mental capacities. If your mind wanders, try to pick up where your brain left off. It might help to ask the speaker to rephrase a previous statement.

—*Capitalize on thought-speed.* Most of us think at about four times faster than the communicator speaks. It is almost impossible to slow down our thinking speed. What do you do with the excess thinking time while someone is speaking? The good listener uses thought-speed to advantage by applying spare thinking time to what is being said. Your greatest handicap may be not capitalizing on thought-speed. Through listening training, it can be converted into your greatest asset.

F. S. Perls, author of *Gestalt Theory Verbation*, said, "...Don't listen to the words, just listen to what the voice tells you, what the movements tell you, what the posture tells you, what the image tells you."

Barriers to Effective Listening

There are several barriers to effective listening. According to Tortoriello, some of these barriers are as follows:

—Recognizing that a personal risk is involved. Our thoughts and ideas might be changed in some way. Any change is threatening...initially

—Listening for only those things that are relevant to our own goals and objectives

—Listening for only those things that serve to satisfy our own needs

—Casting aside those things that don't conform to our own models of the world

—Filtering the thoughts and ideas of the sender according to our frame of reference, attitudes,

beliefs, expectations and relationship to the message sender.[5]

Have you raised these barriers? Is the message coming directly to you without passing through some fine filters you have placed in the communications loop?

Limit Your Own Talking

This chapter covering approaches to good listening would not be complete unless something was said about limiting our own talking while playing the role of receiver. You cannot be an effective listener if you are too busy talking. Frank Tyger put it this way, "You can only improve on saying nothing by saying nothing often."

Lillico believes that "the more managers listen, feed back information and attempt to see the points of view of their juniors, the more accurate is the communication they receive and the more trust is generated among their colleagues."[6]

Following receipt of each oral communication, there is time for a response. As the receiver of the message, don't monopolize the conversation. Give the communicator an opportunity to respond to your comments or questions. As the source of the message, he should be given a chance to have the last word. If you give him that opportunity, he will feel important and believe he has communicated effectively. You, as the receiver, may feel justly that you have played your role as receiver well. Then, the communication can be considered truly effective.

This brings to mind a comment made by Adlai E. Stevenson in an address to the National Press Club many years ago, when he said, "You invited me to speak today; therefore, you have an obligation to listen. I accepted your invitation; therefore, I have an obligation to perform. I trust we will both fulfill our obligations at the same time."

Closing Comments

Listening is a physical process, just like seeing. Listening, like reading, is also an intellectual process, which can be improved by training. Real listening is an activity of the ears, the eyes and the heart. It is a process which demands certain skills to understand what we observe and hear, as well as what we don't hear—silence and omissions. If you combine these inputs, there is a basis for effective communication.

Have you become an effective (good) listener? Do you listen intently and try to understand what the sender means? Do you try to put your understanding of the message in your own words and feed back what you feel the communicator meant—without adding to or deleting anything from the message? If so, you will be able to reach an understanding with the originator of the message.

Are you willing to enter the communicator's world for a few moments and share his experiences through intensive listening? By so doing, you can become an effective listener and convey a great kindness to him. At that point, you have taken a positive step toward improving your ability to communicate with others. Thomas Morrell once said, "The first great gift we can bestow on others is a good example."

Perhaps you have heard it said, "God gives us two ears but only one mouth. Some people say that is because He wanted us to spend

twice as much time listening as talking. Others claim it is because he knew listening was twice as hard as talking." I believe it was the latter.

Let us never forget that effective oral communication with others starts with effective listening. Since we spend more time in listening than in any other communication skill, we would all be well advised to place more emphasis on this neglected tool for effective interaction between individuals.

A good listener is a silent flatterer. Are you such a person?

Endnotes

1. Saul W. Gellerman, *Management by Motivation* (New York: American Management Association, 1968), p. 46.

2. Kenneth O. Johnson, "The Effect of Classroom Training Upon Listening Comprehension," *The Journal of Communication I* (May 1951): 58.

3. Keith Davis, *Human Behavior At Work*, Fifth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1977), p. 385.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

5. Thomas R. Tortoriello, Stephen J. Blatt, and Sue DeWine, *Communication in the Organization*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1978), pp. 105, 106.

6. T. Michael Lillico, *Managerial Communication*, (Great Britain: Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1972), p. 100.



To read is to
lend an ear to
countless voices speaking
through ageless time.

—Anon

VIII

READING SKILLS

How efficiently do you read? Do you have more to read than time allows? You probably don't have to look beyond the top of your desk to realize the importance of reading efficiently. Managers are shuffling more paper and reading more reports and books than ever before. In many cases, their reading has become narrow and specialized, to keep up with their chosen fields or to learn more about specific management practices. The solution is to read more efficiently.

For purposes of the following discussion, I would like to define efficient reading as the extraction of information and meaning from a letter, electronic mail, memo, paper, report, or book as rapidly and completely as possible. In this process the individual words are only important in the way they contribute information and meaning.

Managers cannot afford to pass up any opportunity to improve their reading skills. Alec Mackenzie, author of *The Time Trap*, found that managers are spending roughly 30 percent of their time reading.[1] Although the need to read efficiently is clear, managers often possess reading abilities far below their capacities. They learned to read during their elementary years and have not taken advantage of reading improvement programs available today. Their limited reading techniques have not prepared them for the formidable array of letters, electronic mail, memos, papers, and reports they read daily. Unfortunately, some otherwise efficient managers are unable to read and readily understand information presented in professional journals, magazines, and books published in their chosen fields. Others forego the opportunity to read for pleasure daily papers, weeklies, monthly magazines, and books because they read too slowly. They cannot afford time to read more extensively.

Samuel Johnson said, "A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good." And Samuel McChord Crothers adds, "I would not call anyone a gentle

reader who does not now and then take up a dull book and enjoy it in the spirit in which it is written."

According to Richard Steele, "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body." If you truly desire to read efficiently, there are basic steps you can take to master this communication skill. At the outset, give thoughtful consideration to the key factors described below which influence reading efficiency.

Key Factors

The most important factor in efficient reading is comprehension. Reading is not simply a process of examining words, but one of extracting information and meaning from them. Francis Bacon once said "Reading maketh a full man...." Thomas Carlyle believed, "The best effect of any book is that it excites the reader to self-activity."

Comprehension is the ability to understand what you read. It depends upon your ability to concentrate while reading and to grasp and retain ideas. "The real purpose of books is to trap the mind into its own thinking," said Christopher Morley.

There are three things that you, as the reader, can do to gain full meaning of the written word. First, determine the writer's basic theme or purpose in preparing the document, whatever its length.

Second, determine the writer's point of view and examine his supporting evidence.

Third, evaluate the written word on the basis of your understanding of it, and decide whether to accept or reject the basic thesis of the writer.

Another important factor in efficient reading is the rate at which you progress through the written word. You must be able to read rapidly—to get the message quickly—because time is a valuable commodity. In a survey of chief executives, some 83 percent said they did not have time to keep up with the reading in their fields.[2] This is shocking when one realizes that keeping aware of developments in a chosen field is of paramount importance for managerial survival today.

A factor also worthy of note is adaptability. From time to time you should check to be sure you are adapting your comprehension and reading rate to (a) the nature of the material you are reading; i.e., "light" or "heavy" matter, and (b) your reading objectives.

Finally, the efficient reader is discriminating. He chooses carefully what he reads. He decides in advance what might be gained from reading the material. Then he determines the most efficient manner to gain that knowledge. If the material must be understood thoroughly, he reads with attention to detail. If the material must be read to gain some general information, he reads rapidly. This saves time and still provides the information needed.

Reading Rate

How fast do you read? How fast can you read? There is considerable controversy over the pace at which people can read efficiently. Some say that, 900 words per minute is the limit imposed by physiological barriers; others claim that this reading rate can be exceeded when the material is non-technical in nature.

Numerous courses are devoted to improving the rate at which we read. They are known as either speed-reading or rapid-reading courses. These courses often rely heavily on mechanical devices that force the student to concentrate and read more and more rapidly.

The experts who developed the speed-reading courses believe the average reader just plods along. Therefore, most of us have potential to improve our reading rate. If you're going to try to improve your rate, a reasonable goal would be to increase it threefold. To do so, you must first examine your present reading habits.

A great deal of effort and concentrated practice is required to increase your reading rate. It is up to you to dedicate yourself to the task. Initial improvement may come about quite readily. Experts in the field have found the average college graduate can improve his reading rate by simply trying harder. It is interesting to note that this increased rate can take place without any loss of comprehension.

If you are really sincere about increasing your reading rate, there are five basic steps to take:

—Increase your span of recognition

—Decrease your fixation time

—Decrease the number of regressions

—Eliminate subvocalization

—Increase your vocabulary.

Let's briefly examine each of these steps.

Span of Recognition. Your eyes move and then pause one or more times as they cross a line of written material. Reading occurs during the stops between the movements. The frequency of these stops, called "fixations," is determined by the eye span—the span of recognition. If the span of recognition is increased, fewer fixations per line and an increase in reading rate will occur. With practice, the span of recognition can be increased. Practice reading the daily paper with a single fixation per line.

Fixation Time. If you are a slow reader, you not only make more fixations but take more time on each fixation than faster readers. Force yourself to read at an uncomfortable rate and you will soon reduce the fixation time. Time yourself using a stop watch, and try to read each succeeding page of a book at a faster rate.

Regression. When your eyes move backward to the left side of a page to fix on a word or phrase, you are regressing. Fast readers make fewer regressions than slow readers. Regression is not necessarily bad. Regression to analyze a confusing statement or to reexamine an unfamiliar word is certainly desirable to improve comprehension. It is important to note that when your mind begins to wander while reading, regression increases. Therefore, try to keep your reading rate high and your mind interested in the material you are reading.

Subvocalization. Most of us learned to read aloud before we learned to read silently. Consequently, when we started to read silently, we tended to continue to say each word to ourself. Subvocalization can limit our reading rate to as few as 250 to 300 words per minute--the rate many of us read aloud. A faster reader uses only his eyes and

brain to read silently. His throat muscles do not vibrate. Continued practice at speeds greater than 400 words per minute will do much to break the subvocalizing habit. Also, chewing gum while reading silently may help to break this longstanding habit. In any case, don't become discouraged if you can't break the habit completely.

Vocabulary. If you have a poor vocabulary, your comprehension will be diminished and you will have a greater tendency to regress. The best way to increase your vocabulary is to read more extensively, and thus find new meanings for old words. Also, new words will become more clear in context. Take time to find the new words you discover in the dictionary. As you learn the meanings and uses of these new words, as well as new meanings for old words, they will become an active part of your reading vocabulary—provided you continue to read extensively.

In the final analysis, remember that reading rate is a variable. Your reading rate will be higher when you read "light" rather than "heavy" material.

Some Final Observations

Reading improvement is a continuing process. It should not terminate upon graduation from high school or college. For leaders of our modern, complex organizations efficient reading is imperative.

The main barriers to efficient reading will always be short spans of recognition, long fixation time, regression, subvocalization, and inadequate vocabulary. To become an efficient reader, try to overcome these barriers. You can do so by following the suggestions made here. You can then increase your reading efficiency still more by adjusting your reading rate to your reading objective and reading material.

Part of the art of reading is to skip judiciously. In fact, it is important to decide whether to read or not to read something at all. Most reports, magazine articles, or books have only a few useful ideas to offer. The trick is to find them quickly. This can be done by:

—Scanning the table of contents for a rough idea of what it is all about

—Scanning it quickly to get to know the writer and how he writes

—Reading carefully those sections that appear to contain the information in which you have an interest.

If you make a decision not to read an article, report, or book, you have gained time and not filled your mind with useless information. This gives you more time for important and entertaining reading. Regarding reading for entertainment, Bennett Cerf believed that anybody fortunate enough "...to have learned the joys of reading in his formative years...knows there has never been, and never will be a substitute for a good book."[3] Someone has pointed out that "the person who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the person who can't read them."

This, of course, raises the question of what is a good book. Henry David Thoreau believed it was "...something as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvelous, ambraisal and fertile, as a fungus or a lichen." How would you define a good book?

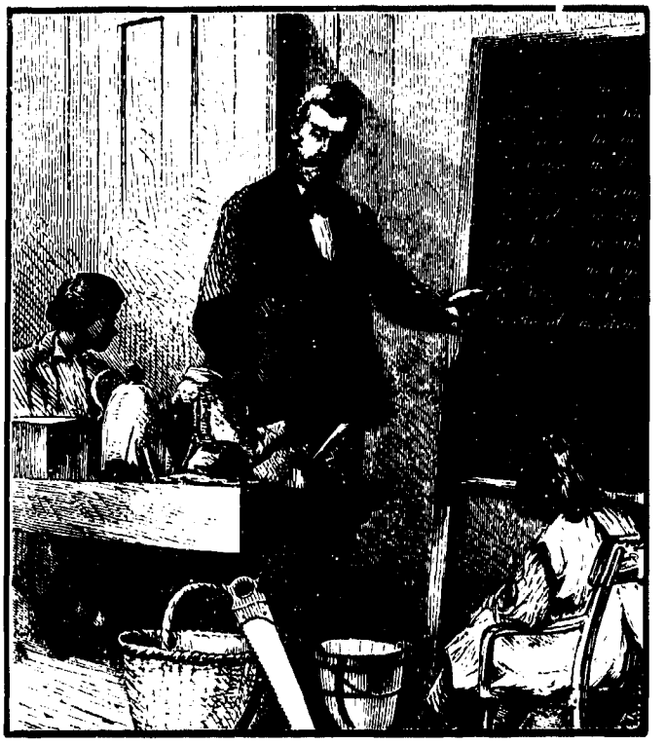
On the subject of reading, Abraham Lincoln said, "A capacity and taste for reading gives access to whatever has been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems. And not only so; it gives a relish and facility for pursuing the unsolved ones."

Isaac Watts sums it all up this way:

> ...thanks to my friends for their care in my breeding, who taught me betimes to love working and reading.

Endnotes

1. R. Alec Mackenzie, *The Time Trip* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), Paperback Edition, Chapter 4.
2. "People at Work: The Executive Time," *Personnel*, May-June 1968.
3. Bennett Cerf, *Reading for Pleasure* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. XIV



The man who wishes to make a careful answer must wait to apprehend exactly the sense and intent of him who asks the question.

—Plutarch

IX

IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONS

How important are questions when it comes to effective communication? Do they have a role? Would our communications be as effective if questioning was discouraged? I think not. Questions play a vital role in effective communication. An English proverb states "Many things are lost for want of asking."

While preparing the revision to this book, a friend asked: "Are you going to include a discussion of the importance of questions in the new edition? This was a good question. My answer, of course, was immediate and affirmative. Unfortunately, I neglected to point out the importance of questions in the first edition. Firch recognized the importance of questions when he wrote that questions "...set the learner's thinking...promote activity and energy on their parts, and...arouse the whole mental faculty into action.[1]" When Gertrude Stein was dying, she asked her companion, Alice B. Toklas: "What is the answer?" Then, Miss Toklas asked her: "What is the question?"

Effective communication involves a two-way flow of information from sender to receiver and then from receiver back to sender. The reverse flow consists of questions, comments, ideas, and so on about opportunity to clarify the message conveyed and indicates to the sender how much of his message has gotten through and is understood. Wilferd A. Peterson suggests we be inquisitive listeners. Ask questions. Everyone has something to say that will help us grow.

Kinds of Questions

We face three kinds of questions. The first are big, perennial and open-ended. They are concerned with the ends of men. They involve us in continuing debate.

The second are the means/ends questions. They require good answers, which may not be final.

The third are the little, important ones. They are questions of means only. The answers to these are of limited scope.[2]

Let's look at these questions another way. First, there are questions dealing with life management. What is the most effective way to learn to read and to write, to speak and to listen, and to observe and visualize?

Second, there are questions you ask as a manager. You have probably asked yourself: "How do I get the time, the energy, and the budget to do what is important?" How do I find the time to work with my professional society, the Boy (or Girl) Scouts, my church, club, other organizations? How do I find time to read interesting reports, books and magazines available to me daily? These are critical management questions.

Finally, there are little questions like: Where do you look for...? What does one do to...? Why do I have to...? How do I get from A to B? These questions are important, but the real challenge each faces is: "Where or how do I find the answers?"

Let's consider the role of questions in day-to-day conversations. The role appears to be clear. When talking to someone, you or your friend might ask for more information, clarification of a comment, the source of more information, or any of a myriad of questions. "You recognize the reality of facts," says Peterson, "but you use your imagination to penetrate beneath them and to project your thought beyond them in your search for creative answers to problems."

In communications between two people, or several people, the degree of understanding is enhanced and broadened by questions along the way. During a conversation with a friend, instead of asking a specific question, it may be worthwhile to repeat something your friend has just said in a questioning tone of voice. The response received will often lead to further information that can add to understanding your friend's comment. It is through questions and answers that conversations lead to new levels of understanding. The conversation becomes an enriching experience.

Questions After Presentations

After a speech or presentation of ideas on a special topic, the speaker normally takes questions from the audience. This is worthwhile. He may have had more information to share, but couldn't do it in the time allocated. On the other hand, through questions he learns whether the audience understood the basic message, received a right or wrong message, or found gaps or flaws in the presentation. The questions, then, become a learning experience for speaker and audience. Socrates, the great teacher, asked questions of his audience; then, he questioned the answers.

During the question-and-answer period after a presentation, the audience has an opportunity to elicit more information, clarify points of interest, and learn where to obtain additional information on the subject of the presentation, to correct misunderstandings, and to air points of agreement or disagreement. Generally, questions by the audience are neutral, non-judgmental, and non-accusing. The audience is seeking to keep the subject at hand flowing along the theme established by the speaker. This give-and-take is often the most important for ensuring that effec-

tive communciation takes place between the speaker and the audience.

Let's consider two special types of questions, probing and confrontational.

Probing Questions

Probing, using a question requiring more than a yes or no answer, is a skill that either gives you more information or assists you in focusing on a situation. Some typical statements of a probing nature are:

—What are your thoughts about...?

—I'm wondering what your reaction is to...

—Can you tell me more about...?

Probing directs the speaker to think more deeply about the topic. Using this skill, you may be able to have the speaker identify additional matters that you want him to focus on or pursue further.

A probing question, which is an open-ended question, cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. If you wish to explore a subject in more detail, avoid questions beginning with Do, Is, and Are. They can be answered with one word. Instead, raise questions beginning with What, Where, When, and How. Or, consider using a statement like "Give me more information about..." or "Tell me more about...." Why, not as effective as the four just cited, may elicit a defensive response because people are not always clear about their motives.

Confrontational Questions

Confrontation is the deliberate use of a question to assist the speaker to focus on an area or subject he seems to be avoiding. "Actions speak louder than words," so confrontation is used to make the actions of the speaker match the words he uses. Contradiction may arise between the way the speaker sees himself and the way others see him.

An effective confrontation is directed at something it is possible to change. It is best not to have a confrontation until you have established a relationship of common respect with the person you are going to confront. Reactions to confrontations vary. If the person accepts the confrontation, it is desirable to make a positive statement to reinforce the action. However, if the person denies the confrontation, it is desirable to listen carefully to what he says. He might be confused or unclear as to what was meant by your statement. In that case, you might have to clarify what you had in mind.

Confrontation is one of the most powerful communication tools at our disposal. It can help a person assume responsibility for his behavior and build a feeling of honesty and trust. Of course, there are some risks involved when confrontation is used. It is your responsibility, then, to judge whether the situation and timing of the confrontation are such that the other person will benefit from it.[4]

Final Thoughts

Answers to all questions, according to Dale, come from three sources: one's memory bank, computer storage banks, and other memory banks like encyclopedias, dictionaries, and yearbooks. We should spend time on the higher mental processes of critical questioning, evaluating, and applying what is available rather than on

lower mental processes like memorizing. Thornton Wilder wrote "there is no true education save in answers to urgent questioning. Unease and deprivation awaken...the mind to inquiry."[5]

John Stuart Mill suggested we "...question all things; never turn away from any difficulty; accept no doctrine either from ourselves or from other people without a rigid scouting by negative criticism; let no fallacy, or incoherence, or confusion of thought, step by unperceived; above all, insist upon having the meaning of a work clearly understood before using it, and the meaning of a proposition before assenting to it. These are the lessons we learn from ancient dialecticians."[6]

George Santayana reminds us that "By nature's kindly disposition most questions which it is beyond man's power to answer do not occur to him at all."

Endnotes

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2. Edgar Dale, "The Art of Questioning," *The News Letter*, Volume XXXIV, Number 3, December 1968.
3. Ibid.
4. Notes from a lecture by Susan Scott of Susan Scott and Associates, Lincoln, Neb., at the Defense Systems Management College, January 5, 1987.
5. Thornton Niven Wilder, *The Eighth Day*.
6. John Stuart Mill, inaugural address as rector of the University of St. Andrew, February 1, 1867.



New ideas are always suspect, and usually opposed, without any other reason than because they are not already common.

—John Locke

X

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Most of us desire to communicate effectively, but do not have a keen appreciation of the barriers to be faced. Because of these barriers, there is ample opportunity for something to go wrong in any communication. Competent managers develop an awareness of the barriers and learn to cope with them.

How effectively do you, as a program manager or functional manager, communicate with your superiors, subordinates and peers? Do you recognize the barriers to effective communication? Have you learned to cope with them? In the discussion that follows, the principal barriers to communicating effectively in today's working environment are identified, and proven techniques for coping with them are considered.

Principal barriers to effective communication are: noise, poor feedback, selection of inappropriate media, a wrong mental attitude, insufficient or lack of attention to word selection, delay in message transmittal, use of abstract words, physical separation of the sender and receiver, and lack of empathy or a good relationship between the sender and receiver.

Let's examine each of these barriers and possible steps to overcome them. As we conduct this examination, we should remember that any two or more of these barriers may occur in combination.

Noise Barrier

Samuel Hoffenstein in his poem, "The Wind in the Trees," illustrates quite beautifully the distraction that noise may cause. He says:

> When the wind is in the tree,
> It makes a noise just like the sea,
> As if there were not noise enough
> To bother one, without that stuff.

Noise is any random or persistent disturbance that obscures, reduces, or confuses the clarity or quality of the message being transmitted. In

other words, it is any interference that takes place between the sender and the receiver. This is why we generally identify any communication problem that can't be fully explained as "noise."

The biggest single cause of noise in the communication process may be the assumption that the act of communicating is a simple process—that it doesn't require much thought or practice and all effective managers were born with this skill. This is not true. Effective communication comes with study and practice. The effectiveness of the communication process is dependent upon the capabilities of the senders and receivers.

To overcome the noise barrier to effective communication, one must discover its source. This may not be easy. Noise appears in a variety of ways. During a conversation, have you ever been distracted by the pictures on the wall, the view from the window, a report lying open on a desk, or a conversation taking place in an adjacent room? Many people have been so distracted.

In the perusal of a written communication, have you ever been confused by irrelevant material or the illogical approach taken by the author? Again, many people have.

Once the source, or sources, of the noise has been identified, steps can be taken to overcome it. The noise barrier can't always be overcome but, fortunately, just the awareness of its existence by either the sender or the receiver of a message can help to improve the communication flow.

Feedback Problem

In Chapter II, I indicated that feedback is reaction. Without it, the sender of the message cannot know whether the recipient has received the entire message or grasped its intent.

The need for feedback should be clearly understood. Feedback is the return of a portion of the message to the sender, with new information. It regulates both the transmission and reception. The whole process is straightforward: the sender transmits the message via the most suitable communication media; the receiver gets the message, decodes it and provides feedback.

In oral, face-to-face communication, the process doesn't happen quite this way. All of these actions occur almost simultaneously. For example, the sender is acting as a receiver while transmitting the message; the receiver is acting as a sender while receiving the message. When the message is transmitted and effectively received, feedback serves as a regulating device. The sender continually adjusts his transmission in response to the feedback. Feedback also alerts the sender to any disruptive noise that may impede reception of the message.

There is no feedback in a one-way communication. Such a communication involves passing ideas, information, directions and instructions from higher management down the chain of command without asking for a response or checking to see if any action has taken place. It is not enough to ensure the message has been received. For communication to be effective, a two-way process must exist so the sender knows whether the message has been understood. The two-way communication process involves sending a message down the chain of com-

mand and transmitting a response containing information, ideas and feelings back up the chain. This process has been referred to sometimes as "a process of material influence."

Feedback not only regulates the communication process, but reinforces and stimulates it. In fact, it actually serves as the hallmark of dialogue, because it forces communication and makes it dual. Dual expression, when combined with mutual feedback, becomes a dialogue.

Problem of Media Selection

In any given situation, the medium, or media, for communication must be selected. One medium may work better than another. However, in many cases a combination of media may be used for the communication process to function effectively.

Henry H. Albers says that no one communication medium can adequately serve the diverse functional and personal problems of organization dynamics. He believes that "a repetition of ideas in different terms is useful in solving some communication problems."[1] The question then emerges, What combination of media would be most effective? Any project to develop the one best combination of media would prove rather fruitless. There are many combinations that can provide satisfactory results.

The personal qualities of the manager should be a consideration in media selection. As manager, you should recognize your strengths and limitations. You should evaluate your successes and failures in communication and plan to use the media that best fits your style and qualities.

Generally, managers make more frequent use of oral, rather than written, communication. However, the media one selects for communication in a particular situation should correlate with the feedback requirements. A communication failure or partial failure could occur if the media you select for transmittal of a message is inappropriate and necessary feedback is not received.

Most simple messages can be transmitted orally—either in a face-to-face discussion, formal briefing, or meeting of the staff. More complex messages should be written in a directive, instruction, memorandum, or report. Very complex messages should be transmitted in both oral and written form. Repetition and review of an oral communciation in written form can be a facilitating device.

Mental Barrier

One principal barrier to effective communication is mental. It consists of noise in the mind of the sender or receiver. Here are four examples:

—The arrogance of the sender may impair the communication process. If the sender believes he knows everything there is to know about the subject being transmitted, he expects acceptance of his ideas or directions. If the receiver disagrees with the sender and so states, the sender will not be attuned to the feedback or will find it a challenge to his stated position. Real communication does not take place.

—The sender may assume the receiver will respond to his message in a logical and rational manner. The receiver's priorities, problems or assumptions may differ from the

sender's. The receiver's logic may even override that of the sender. In any of these instances, the sender might judge the receiver to be incompetent or even an obstructionist. Communication will fail.

—The sender may assume he is completely logical and rational—that his position is right and must prevail. This assumption may be false and no communication takes place.

—The sender may have some misconceptions, self-interests, or strong emotions about a particular idea or approach, of which he is not aware. However, these traits may be readily evident to the receiver, who may think the sender is hypocritical. This communication will fail, as may all future communication between this sender and receiver.

Problem of Word Selection

We live in a "verbal" environment. Words constitute the most frequently used tool for communicating. Words usually facilitate communication; however, their careless, improper use in a given situation can create a communication barrier. Arthur Kudner, an advertising executive, once told his son:

> All big things have little names such as life and death, peace and war, or dawn, day, night, hope, love, and home. Learn to use little words in a big way. It is hard to do, but they say what you mean. When you don't know what you mean—use big words; they often fool little people.

The words we use should be selected carefully. Dr. Rudolph Flesch, a specialist in words and communication, suggests a way to break through the word barrier:

—Use familiar words in place of the unfamiliar

—Use concrete words in place of the abstract

—Use short words in place of long

—Use single words in place of several.

Unfortunately, almost every commonly used word has more than one meaning. Also, words have regional meanings, or derive new meanings as a result of the development of new industries or fields. The meaning conveyed by the sender's words depends upon the experience and attitude of the receiver. Therefore, one way to penetrate the word barrier is for the sender to strive to speak or write in terms of the receiver's experience and attitude. The better able he is to do this, the more successful the communication will be. Dr. S. E. Hayakawa, former U. S. Senator from California, expressed it very well when he said, "The meanings of words are not in the words; they are in us."

Use Of Abstract Words

You should be aware that the level of abstraction of the words you use affects communication effectiveness. The higher the level of abstraction, the greater the risk of a misunderstanding. For example, if you as a manager tell a subordinate that "we'll start work at 7 a.m. tomorrow," there is little chance of misunderstanding. However, if you state that "we'll start early tomorrow," there is room for misunderstanding.

"Early" is an abstract word, and abstract words mean different things to different people. They may even mean different things to the same person. Thus, if you wish to improve communications effectiveness, be as specific as possible. Avoid the use of abstract words.[2]

Time and Space Barriers

Time and space (physical separation between sender and receiver) may serve as barriers to effective communication.

You, as program or functional manager, may often feel pressed by time constraints. You may feel there aren't enough hours to accomplish all tasks. One executive puts it this way, "If I can't get the work done in a 24-hour day, I have to work evenings." Caught in the network of your own problems, you may even assume that your subordinates know what you want them to do, and they will proceed to do it. Actually, this may not be the case. Because of your failure to communicate, you may not receive the end product you were expecting.

This same problem may occur when you geographically separate departments or functions of an organization. Quick eye-to-eye communication becomes difficult. The telephone may not provide the answer. The line may be busy when the call is placed, or the person being called may be out of the office. Memoranda sometime provide the answer to the space barrier. However, this might turn out to be a one-way communication of directions or information. If the recipient of a memorandum doesn't understand the message, or if he mistakenly thinks he understands, the communication process fails.

Empathy and Other Relationships

Lack of empathy can create a barrier between the sender and receiver. Empathy, as defined in the latest edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary,* is "understanding so intimate that the feelings, thoughts, and motives of one are readily comprehended by another." You can transmit a better message if you can put yourself in the receiver's place and analyze the message from his viewpoint. The same holds true for the receiver. He must be able to empathize with you. That is, the sender, as well as the receiver, must try to project himself into the other's personality if he wants to increase his potential for effective communication.

The ability to empathize with someone else may not be easy. If you are to see things from another's viewpoint, you have to put aside your own prejudices and preconceptions. The receiver may be of a different race, creed, educational background, from a different section of the country, or have a different speciality or rank within the organization. Under these circumstances, the task of empathizing with the other member of the communication link is difficult. The task is further complicated if you believe that understanding another's viewpoint may pose a threat to your own.

To better communicate, we must try to see ourselves through the eyes of others in the communication link. By developing some empathy with the people to whom we will be directing messages, we might recognize the need to modify our messages from time to time before sending them.

Douglas McGregor, one of the leading authorities on management practices in this country, has said:

> It is a fairly safe generalization that difficulties in communication within an organization are more often than not mere symptoms of underlying difficulties in relationships between parties involved. When communication is ineffective, one needs to look first at the nature of these relationships rather than at ways of improving communication.[3]

The relationship between the people involved in any communication process may form a greater barrier to the effectiveness of the communication between them than any other barrier discussed here. If the relationship between the people participating in the communication is good, the communication has a greater chance for success. This is true whether the communication takes place in oral or written form. The quality of the relationship between the sender and receiver determines to a great extent the ability of the person transmitting the message to penetrate the communication barrier.

Final Observations

We have examined the principal barriers to effective communication. We have seen all around us the problems resulting from the inability of people in today's working environment to penetrate these barriers. What are you going to do about it? Can you let the barriers to effective communication in your organization continue to block the path to effective management? If you and the persons with whom you communicate do your part to reduce these barriers, some of them may be eliminated. As a result, management of your organization will be enhanced.

Why not take such action today?

Endnotes

1. Henry H. Albers, *Management: The Basic Concepts* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1971), pp. 200-201.

2. Enrique F. Aveleyra, "Hurdling the Barriers of Effective Communication," *GAO Review*, Winter 1980.

3. Douglas McGregor, *The Professional Manager* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 151.



The need of a definite system of communication creates the first task of the organizer and is the immediate origin of executive organization.

—Chester I. Barnard

XI

COMMUNICATING WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

This chapter on skill in communication focuses on communication in the organizational structure.

In developing an organizational structure, communication channels are an important consideration. Charles I. Barnard, author of *The Functions of the Executive,*[1] attests to this. The manager in a hierarchical system becomes a link in the communication chain. It is the hierarchical system that gives direction to and imposes restrictions upon the flow of communications. Management decisions and directions flow from higher to lower levels in the organization. Responses and reports from the lower-level managers flow upward in the organization. Managers also spend time communicating with their peers. Therefore, we see from the outset that communication must function effectively in a lateral direction as well as downward and upward.

Committees influence the communication process within an organization. A well-run committee can serve as a supplementary link in the communication chain and provide a means for disseminating information. However, committees often fail to ensure that Managers A and B tell each other what they wish or need to know.

Although they cannot give directions or issue procedures, staff members influence the communication process within an organization. Advice or recommendations of staff members are accepted by subordinate managers, because of the anticipated support by the staff member's superior. When a staff member is given functional decision prerogatives, he essentially assumes the same status as his superior with respect to such matters.

J. C. Warner believes that "one's accomplishment is...in a very real sense dependent upon the quality of the communication with others."[2] John T. Connor says that "there is no more valuable asset in business life than the ability to express one's thoughts with clarity and precision."[3]

Communication Process

To set the stage for information and message flow through an organization, let's review the basic elements of the communication process. These elements include: someone to send the message (the encoder), some means for channeling it, someone to receive it (the decoder), and a feedback mechanism. A multiplicity of encoders, channels, decoders, and feedback mechanisms can be used. However, for the information in a message to be processed clearly, quickly, and with a minimum amount of degradation, management must establish clear, formal communication channels.

Let's assume the message to be transmitted originates with the manager, or that he is serving as the agent for passing along a message from another source. Regardless of the source, the message passes through his (the sender's) filter before it reaches the intended recipient. The sender injects his attitudes and perceptions into the message; determines who should receive it; and the channels through which it should flow; i.e., upward, downward, laterally, or a combination of these. The attitudes and perceptions of the recipient, of course, influence the message translation, as well as the feedback he provides.

Peter F. Drucker, noted exponent of good management practices, says:

> The manager has a specific tool: information. He doesn't "handle" people, but instead he motivates, guides, organizes people to do their own work. His tool—the only tool—to do all this is the spoken or written word or the language of numbers. It does not matter whether the manager's job is engineering, accounting, or spelling. To be effective, a manager must have the ability to listen and to read, and the ability to speak and to write. Managers need skill in getting their thinking across to other people.[4]

This describes quite adequately the manager's role in the communication process.

Communication Channels

The communication channel selected for transmitting a message plays a significant role in maintaining the quality of the original message in its passage from sender to receiver. The sender, given the opportunity to weigh the merits of using an oral or written communication, or a combination of the two, selects the most effective for the situation.

Regardless of the communication channel selected, the sender will encounter obstacles. In the previous chapter, the various barriers to effective communication were analyzed. Considering the possible barriers, the sender must choose the channel which he feels will best guarantee transfer of the essence and meaning of his message without misunderstanding or distortion.

To counteract possible interference in the communication channel, the message should attract attention, contain redundancy, continue repetition, or use a combination of these approaches.

To attract attention, the message must be different from others com-

peting for the recipient's time. A short handwritten message instead of the usual typed message is one method that can attract attention.

To provide redundancy, the message must be rephrased several times (the technique used in newspaper articles), and/or summarized in the final paragraph. The sender should avoid too much redundancy because this tends to clutter the communication channel.

To provide repetition, the message must be transmitted through more than one channel, as in spoken and written form, or transmitted more than once through the same channel, as in TV advertising.

Now, let's turn our attention to the basic communication channels within an organization. There are three channels: formal, informal and unofficial.

Formal. Communication within the formal organizational structure that transmits goals, policies, procedures and directions.

Informal. Communication outside the formal organizational structure that fills the organizational gaps, maintains the linkages and handles the one-time situations.

Unofficial. Interpersonal communication within (or among) the social structure of the organization that serves as the vehicle for casual interpersonal exchanges, and transmittal of unofficial communication.

A more detailed examination of each of these communication channels will provide a better understanding of these functions.

Formal Communication

Formal communication—written or oral—follows the chain of command of the formal organization; the communication flows from the manager to his immediate subordinates. Each recipient then retransmits the message in the selected form to the next lower level of management or to staff members, as appropriate. The message progresses down the chain of command, fanning out along the way, until all who have a need to know are informed. Formal communication also flows upward through the organization on the same basis.

Formal communication normally encompasses the transmittal of goals, policies, instructions, memoranda, and reports; scheduled meetings; and supervisory-subordinate interviews.

Informal Communication

No organization operates in a completely formal or structured environment. Communication between operations depicted in an organizational chart do not function as smoothly or as trouble-free as the chart may imply. In most organizations operating effectively, channels of communication have developed outside the hierarchical structure.

The informal communication process supplements the formal process by filling the gaps and/or omissions. Successful managers encourage informal organizational linkages and, at the same time, recognize that circumvention of established lines of authority and communication is not a good regular practice. When lines of authority have been bypassed, the manager must assume responsibility for informing those normally in the chain of command of the action taken.

There is a fine line between using informal communications to expedite the work of the organization

and the needless bypassing of the chain of command. The expediting process gets the job done, but bypassing the chain of command causes irritation and can lead to hard feelings. To be effective, the manager must find a way to balance formal and informal communication processes.

Unofficial Communication

Astute program and functional managers recognize that a great deal of communication taking place within their organizations is interpersonal. News of revised policies and procedures, memoranda, and minutes of meetings are subjects of conversation throughout the organization. These subjects often share the floor with discussions of TV shows, sports news, politics and gossip.

The "grapevine" is a part of the unofficial communication process in any organization. A grapevine arises because of lack of information employees consider important: organizational changes, jobs, or associates. This rumor mill transmits information of highly varying accuracy at a remarkable speed. Rumors tend to fall into three categories: those reflecting anxiety, those involving things hoped for and those causing divisiveness in the organization. Some rumors fade with the passing of time; others die when certain events occur.

Employees take part in the grapevine process to the extent that they form groups. Any employee not considered a part of some group is apt to be left out of this unofficial communication process.

The grapevine is not necessarily good or bad. It serves a useful function when it acts as a barometer of employees' feelings and attitudes. Unfortunately, the information traveling along the grapevine tends to become magnified or exaggerated. Employees then become alarmed unnecessarily by what they hear. It is imperative that a manager be continually alert to the circulation of false information. When discovered, positive steps should be taken to provide the correct information immediately.

Coordination—Another Communication Function

One of the major functions of the communication process in an organization is effective coordination. Information available within the various functional groups is normally routed to key decision centers. It must be complete, accurate and timely. When decisions are made, they must be transmitted to all concerned groups within the organization. The messages containing the decisions must be clear and precise. The success of the response to each message is dependent upon the preciseness of the original message, the communication channel used for transmitting it, the interpretation and understanding of the receiver, and the channel selected for transmitting the feedback.

Lawrence A. Appley states:

> There is little risk of oversimplification in saying that good managers are good communicators; poor managers are usually the opposite. If an individual has a sincere desire to clarify his thinking, there is no better way to do it than to put it in writing.[5]

Communication Problems

Management must be continually aware of the barriers to effective communication and take steps necessary to keep the channels open. The barriers were considered in some detail in the previous chapter and they will not be repeated here. However, there are some approaches to solving communication problems that are worthy of consideration at this time.

—Try to maintain a good relationship. A poor superior-subordinate relationship hampers the communication process.

—Don't overlook the importance of upward communication from a subordinate or lateral communication with a peer. This can hamper the communication process.

—Don't clog the channel of communication. Its value may be reduced by a delay in receipt of the communication.

—It is better for you as a manager to pass too much information down the chain of command than to pass too little. The receipt of more information gives your subordinate a feeling of confidence and security; lack of information promotes insecurity and a feeling of not being trusted. The problem in many organizations is that too little information is passed down the chain of command, and too much information is required to be passed up the chain. This problem is discussed in more detail later.

—Pay attention to the selection of the form in which the message will be conveyed. A message not conveyed in an acceptable form may fail to pass the barriers in the communication channel, regardless of whether it is moving down the chain of command, up the chain or laterally.

Overloading

Much attention has been focused on the direction of the communication flow, but very little attention on the quantity of information in the communication chain. In your program or functional organization, is the daily message flow high and low? In most cases, the organization would operate more effectively if the message flow increased; however, there is a limitation on the number of messages an organization can handle.

The free flow of information within an organization is an ideal to be achieved. When the information received far exceeds that required, the recipients cannot give proper attention to what is really needed.[6] Much valuable time is devoted to the sorting and selection process. One of the problems of using redundancy and repetition to minimize breakdown in the communication process is possible overload. Therefore, these techniques must be used with caution. If you are spending an increasing amount of time on the communication process, it is imperative to your future success that you develop an efficient information-processing skill.

How can an organization cope with an information overload situation? There is no one best way. The techniques that have been developed are often used in conjunction with one another. One technique involves filtering the messages so that the important ones, those requiring immediate action, get to the decision-maker first. Another technique involves delegating and

decentralizing the decision-making process so messages do not go to a single executive. Still another technique involves carefully selecting information sources and eliminating those proven inaccurate or unreliable.

Need and Benefits

Sometimes top executives come to grips with basic practical viewpoints which, when carefully articulated, can help all of us. In a presentation to undergraduates at Oklahoma Christian College in 1978. Howard W. Blauvelt said, "Business needs skilled communicators."[7] This is a more kindly stance than that taken by many leading educators who are appalled at the inability of undergraduates to spell, write simple effective English, or express themselves orally. "The ability to listen, digest, distill and further communicate information is fundamental," Blauvelt said. His message is clear.

Robert W. Sarnoff has said:

> Today's leaders are frequently men and women who have mastered the art of communication. They know how to get their ideas across. And successful people—those who are continually sought for key positons—effectively combine their ability to communicate with a solid foundation of knowledge. For knowledge is the predominant quality in the transmission of ideas.[8]

Do you have the basic knowledge to function effectively in your position? Assuming you have, have you developed the necessary communication skills to impart this knowledge to others?

Peter J. Prior says:

> A major factor which must be considered, if the benefits of leadership are to be given full rein in an organization, is the existence of a good communications system, from top to bottom and across....This is an area where a pinch of good practice is worth a pound of good theory.[9]

Are you employing that "pinch of good practice," or are you bogged down with "a pound of theory?"

Harry O. Bercher says, "The accurate transmission of ideas and facts from one mind to another is a complex process with many pitfalls."[10] Success in program or functional management may depend on your skill in applying the communication process effectively in your day-to-day activities.

Endnotes

1. Charles I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951).

2. J. C. Warner, President Emeritus, Carnegie-Mellon University.

3. John T. Connor, Chairman of the Board, Allied Chemical Company.

4. Peter F. Drucker, *People and Performance: The Best of Peter Drucker on Management* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 56.

5. Lawrence A. Appley, former Chairman of the Board, American Management Association.

6. E. M. Rogers and R. Agarwala-Rogers, *Communication in Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

7. Howard W. Blauvelt, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Continental Oil Company, at Oklahoma Christian College, Fall 1978.

8. Robert W. Sarnoff, Chairman, RCA Corporation.

9. Peter J. Prior, *Leadership Is Not a Bowler Hat* (Great Britain: David & Charles Ltd., Brunel House, Newton Abbott, 1977), p. 51.

10. Harry O. Bercher, President, International Harvester Company.



**The mutual confidence
on which all else depends
can be maintained only by an
open mind and a brave reliance
upon free discussion.**

—Learned Hand

XII

CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS

Executives and managers are spending more time in meetings. According to a recent survey, they work an average of 59 hours a week and attend meetings an average of 21 hours a week. Seventeen percent are in meetings more than 29 hours; 16 percent, 25-29 hours; 22 percent 20-24 hours; 16 percent 15-19 hours; 10-14 percent, 17 hours; 10 percent, 5-9 hours; 2 percent, fewer than 5 hours.[1]

How long was your last meeting? Was it successful or were you unimpressed, bored or frustrated? Did it accomplish the stated purpose? Were you an effective chairperson or an active participant? Were those who had a contribution to make invited? These questions and many more need to be asked and answered affirmatively if an organizational meeting is to be successful.[2]

Today, meetings appear to be the way most managers choose to get things done. Managers are committed to the idea of group participation, and they believe they can make a better decision by capturing information from a number of people. Further, they believe meetings can serve as an effective method of communication within the organization.

Some managers have rightfully categorized meetings as time-consuming, high-priced, and unproductive, but this need not be the case. Sometimes, we expect too much from a meeting. When it fails to meet our expectations, we may be too quick to criticize. William E. Utterback, author of *Group Thinking and Conference Leadership,* said "It must not be supposed that the conference table possesses the magic property of generating wisdom when rubbed simultaneously by a dozen pairs of elbows."

Meetings are helpful means of accomplishing some purpose or goal through group interaction. When there is a gathering of people with a common interest and relevant knowledge or expertise, the meeting:

—Encourages participation in the subject of concern

—Integrates interests

—Broadens perspectives and changes attitudes

—Improves decision-making

—Motivates and commits participants to courses of action.

The fundamental decision concerning meetings is not whether to hold them, but how to make them effective. Recent studies alluded to earlier, showed that managers spend much time in meetings. An unproductive meeting can result in substantial loss to an organization. On the other hand, a productive meeting becomes a tool for effective management communication, and serves as a vehicle for development of specific plans or the organization of specific tasks.

Successful meetings don't just happen; they occur as a result of an established need; careful planning and preparation; good leadership; close attention to details before, during and after the meeting; and a friendly and cooperative climate.

Planning Process

Key steps to be taken by the chairperson in planning a meeting are as follows:

—Establish meeting objective(s)

—Prepare meeting agenda

—Determine timing and physical arrangements

—Identify and invite people who can make a contribution

—Brief participants in advance

—Consider matters of protocol.

Let's review each step in detail.

Meeting Objectives

Why is the meeting being held? What will it accomplish? Meetings are usually held for one or more of the following reasons:

—To disseminate new information or provide feedback

—To receive a report

—To coordinate efforts of a specific nature and obtain group support

—To win acceptance for a new idea, plan or system

—To initiate creative thinking

—To solve a current problem

—To reconcile a conflict

—To negotiate an agreement

—To motivate members of a group

—To delegate work.

The meeting plan should not be too broad or the meeting may be doomed from the beginning. Therefore, a wise chairperson identifies realistic objectives for the meeting and is prepared to meet them.

Meeting Agenda

Is an agenda necessary? How long will it require to carry out the agenda? Would the meeting run smoothly and be just as successful without it?

The agenda should crystallize the intended meeting objective(s) and establish the time available to accomplish them. Whether the agenda is in writing or stated verbally by the chairperson, it provides the framework to keep the meeting on target. Furthermore, it permits the chairman to devote his attention to managing the interplay of the participants.

The meeting should focus on the objective(s) and also on reaching the objective(s) in a preestablished, finite time schedule. Meetings that exceed established time limits usually are not constructive because opinions begin to replace facts. Such meetings are apt to go astray and may even disintegrate into personal contests or power plays between participants.

There are several other points to consider during preparation of the agenda. Notable among them are:

—Focus the agenda on items relating to the same general topic, if possible. Begin with a discussion of topics of major concern to participants; then, if necessary, discuss related topics of lesser importance. A meeting of this type requires fewer attendees and generates better participation in the discussion.

—Schedule fewer agenda items when the topics cannot be related. It is difficult for most participants to come to a meeting completely prepared on a wide variety of topics. The more concise the agenda, the better.

—When the agenda is distributed, attach background data for each topic to be discussed. This will give each participant familiarity with the topics before arriving at the meeting.

—Establish a time limit and priority for each agenda item. Consider whether the topic to be discussed is familiar, new, controversial or complex.

—Don't have the meeting run too long. One hour is usually the norm for busy middle- to upper-level managers. When the meeting is scheduled on a quarterly, semiannual, or annual basis, it may have to run longer to accomplish the objectives. Schedule a "break" when the meeting is expected to take more than 2 hours.

—Submit the agenda to the participants, with the background data, as early as possible. This will give each participant more time to prepare for the meeting.

If you are the chairperson, be sure the meeting is needed. If the need disappears, cancel the meeting.

Timing and Physical Arrangements

When should the meeting be held? Where should it be held?

There are several necessary considerations regarding timing and physical arrangements for the meeting and the materials needed. Among the more important are:

—Convenience of the meeting place

—Room size; not too large or too small. If the right-size room is not available, it is better to select a small room, rather than a room that is too large. A small room presents a friendlier atmosphere than a large, sparsely filled one.

—Seating arrangement and availability of extra seats, if needed

—Presentation aids required and their proper use

—Lighting, heating and ventilation

—Reading materials and reports

—Extra paper and pencils

—Nameplates and/or nametags

—Message handling

—Scheduling breaks.

It is the chairperson's responsibility to begin and end the meeting on time. It is the responsibility of attendees to arrive on time. Two techniques proved effective in curing cases of chronic tardiness are (1) ignoring latecomers and (2) making no attempt to bring latecomers up to date.

Meeting Size

How many persons should be invited to the meeting? What is the purpose of inviting each person? Before extending an invitation, the chairperson should recognize that each additional person brings to the meeting basic needs, feelings, personality, aspirations and competitiveness, along with abilities and talents.

Attendees, of course, should be viewed as management resources—each able to contribute to the meeting through knowledge or experience or both. It is wise to include some persons in the organization to whom action items may be given after the meeting. This tends to encourage better support for the topics to be discussed. Attendance by disinterested persons tends to increase non-relevant discussion and impede the meeting.

The size of the meeting tends to affect the way it functions. If attendance exceeds seven, there is a tendency for communication to become more centralized, and participants have less opportunity to communicate directly with one another. As the number of people invited increases, the ability of the chairperson to predict the interaction that will take place becomes more difficult. A 10-person meeting, for example, creates 45 different relationships!

Because each additional person increases the risk of meeting failure, the chairperson should justify each person's participation. Proponents of the "small group" theory consider seven, as indicated previously, to be the maximum number of participants for a productive meeting. However, if a problem-solving type of meeting is to be held, some authorities claim that up to 12 participants can be accommodated effectively. If the number of participants exceeds 18, the chairperson may find it almost impossible to accomplish the meeting objectives.

On the other hand, in a meeting involving only three participants, there may be a tendency for two of them to form a combination against the third participant. This could be disastrous so managers should guard against organizing too small a meeting.

It is important to have all relevant points of view on a particular subject under consideration represented at the meeting, even if this makes it a large meeting. Keep in mind, however, a large meeting requires increased formality and extra time for each topic to ensure adequate communication between participants.

Communication With Participants Before Meeting

Notify participants well in advance of the meeting date, and provide them with an agenda and background data.

Matters of Protocol

Why should the chairperson be concerned about protocol? How can this affect the success of a meeting?

One of the initial steps to ensure a successful meeting is to give adequate consideration to protocol. Protocol might be defined as the application of common-sense courtesy.

Some steps the chairperson might take to avoid protocol problems are:

—Notify department heads when subordinates with expertise are needed.

—Notify participants in advance of meeting.

—Make sure arrangements with resource persons outside the organization are completed before the meeting.

—Introduce resource persons and newcomers at the start of the meeting. Also, make their affiliations and expertise known to the other attendees.

—List participants in alphabetical order in the meeting announcement and minutes, unless someone present far outranks the others. In that case, list this person first.

—Express gratitude to those from outside the group, as well as to those within the group, for significant contributions to the success of the meeting.

—Advise those invited to attend the meeting of postponement or cancellation as far in advance as possible.

Responsibilities of Chairperson

The chairperson—the one who plans, hosts and leads a meeting—must establish a proper environment. The environment, and the feeling conveyed to the participants by the chairperson, will have a great impact on the outcome of the meeting. The chairperson must stimulate, guide, clarify, control, summarize and evaluate the discussion, keeping in mind his responsibility to accomplish the meeting objectives. If he fails to perform his role effectively, the meeting may turn into meaningless discussions of irrelevant subjects, a series of pointless power plays and even boring monologues.

The chairperson should make the meeting as relaxed and informal as possible. He should: start the meeting on time; "manage" the meeting; be enthusiastic and speak when appropriate; encourage discussion; seek a consensus; not pontificate; listen to participants; use humor that comes naturally out of the exchange; praise and thank participants (as appropriate); when a decision is reached, establish an action plan; summarize results; end the meeting on time. Under no circumstances should the chairperson be unprepared, "hog" the discussion, play the comic, chastise a participant or let the meeting run by itself. It is the responsibility of the chairperson to do everything possible to ensure the meeting environment by its nature encourages attention to the established agenda.

It is essential that the chairperson be familiar not only with parliamentary usage and set the example of strict conformity thereto, he should be a person of executive ability and capable of controlling men and women. He should set an example of courtesy, and should never forget that to control others, it is necessary to control one's self.[3]

The meeting will not get off the ground unless participants know where they are going. Therefore, it is important the chairperson makes a concerted effort to ensure that:

—Every participant has a clear understanding of the meeting objectives at the start of the meeting.

—Each agenda item has a priority and is allocated sufficient time for discussion.

—The objective(s) remain valid throughout the meeting. If not, they should be revised.

—The pacing of the meeting is monitored carefully.

—Attendees feel important and needed.

—Emotional buildups, if they occur, are mollified early on.

—Facts are separated from beliefs or opinions.

—Points of agreement are summarized and opposing points of view are clarified.

—Big problems are divided into subproblems and addressed separately, if possible.

—The meeting keeps moving, giving it a sense of momentum and continuing success.

Do you, when serving as chairperson, play your role well at a meeting? For a meeting to succeed, the chairperson must display strong leadership. He, as well as the participants, must be willing and determined to:

—Become acquainted with each other. They might exchange light conversation during the "warm-up" session at the beginning of the meeting.

—Give other participants an opportunity to present their ideas, opinions and recommendations without interrupting or degrading their comments.

—Be there in mind as well as in body.

—Listen wisely and well to all participants.

—Accept new or fresh thoughts and ideas expressed by participants, provided the thoughts and ideas support the objective(s) of the meeting.

—Assist in the process of arriving at a consensus by combining one person's ideas with those of others, reconciling them through compromise, or coordinating them with other ideas.

—Do away with non-relevant issues, perceptions, or personal conjectures as soon as they arise and before they can become disruptive.

—Permit a little humor. It is a tonic for the mind and body.

—Be patient and flexible (but with caution).

—Adjourn the meeting when the work is completed.

Major Problems In Running a Meeting

A major problem in running a meeting involves dealing with the personalities of participants. For example, the chairperson may be dominant/submissive, have a desire to be liked, or want to impress superiors. On the other hand, the invited participants may be self-centered, talkative/shy, aggressive/defensive, argumentative/unresponsive. Participants may have trouble communicating because of differences in age, rank, expertise and prestige. The ideas of some participants may be ignored and others ridiculed. The mood of the group may be one of elation, depression or regression. There is no way to avoid these personality problems.

The challenge facing the chairperson is how to deal with the personality problems effectively. The answer is based upon creating an environment for effective communication. The problems can usually be resolved if the participants communicate with one another. The problems will not be resolved if they remain hidden. A firmly established, finite time limit for each item on the agenda is one of the single-most effective means of eliminating non-contributory discussion. It gives the group a common purpose and helps the chairperson police inappropriate comments.

Another major problem that groups sometimes face at meetings is participants becoming lost in the problems they are attempting to solve. When this happens the chairperson must take positive action to bring the meeting back on target. He can do this by taking one of the following two courses of action:

—Halting the discussion and redirecting the meeting

—Halting the discussion and trying to find out where it is heading. If it is heading in a direction the participants feel is proper, he can allow the discussion to continue where it left off. If the meeting is heading in the wrong direction, he can change the direction.

The latter course of action is preferable. Failure to do anything almost guarantees meeting failure. Halting the discussion and redirecting the meeting without providing an opportunity for participants to comment tends to create a debilitating emotional reaction. This might lead to withdrawal of some participants from further discussion, or precipitate aggression. When the participants pause to consider where the discussion is heading, there will be few adverse effects and the progress of the meeting may be enhanced.

A third major problem a group might face at a meeting is making a decision at the proper time. If the chairperson feels a consensus has been reached, he should cut off further discussion. A decision reached by consensus is the one most likely to be carried into action effectively. Decisions imposed on a minority by the majority of participants, or on the participants by the chairperson, are not likely to be lasting or effective.

Groups often fall short in trying to reach decisions. Outside pressures or deadlines tend to foster majority-type or chairperson-type decisions. Therefore, it is imperative that the chairperson attempt to create an environment to make a consensus easier to obtain. Such an environment develops when each participant is given an opportunity to be heard or to voice an objection. In any case, before the meeting time limit expires the chairperson should try to get the participants to agree that a decision is necessary, even if it falls short of unanimity.

Participants' Responsibilities

The foregoing discussion focused on the meeting and the role of the chairperson. What about the participants?

If you are a participant, it is important you conduct yourself in the following manner:

—Arrive on time for the meeting.

—Don't leave the meeting or accept phone calls unless you find it

is really urgent to do so. Such actions, when they occur, are very disruptive to a meeting.

—Listen attentively to other participants. Don't let your mind drift to subjects not pertinent to the meeting.

—Contribute what you can, and don't say something that does not add to the discussion at hand.

—Listen for positive contributions; eliminate consideration of negative contributions.

—Focus your attention (as will the chairperson) on achieving meeting objectives. Make your points clearly and concisely.

—Be the kind of participant you expect others to be.

The success of any meeting is not completely dependent upon the chairperson's actions. It is also dependent upon participation by the attendees. Everyone at the meeting should keep the meeting agenda and objectives in focus.

A meeting either informs or confuses, motivates or discourages, persuades or fails to persuade. In the end, as a result of your participation, you will accomplish something or waste your time, your reputation, or even a piece of your life. It is important, therefore, that you not attend a meeting when you don't know what you want to accomplish and how you intend to accomplish it.

Coping With Weakness

To make meetings more effective, one must be acquainted with the major weaknesses of meetings and how to cope with them. The most common weaknesses are that they are slow, expensive, tend to produce a leveling effect, or lead to dilution or division of responsibility. Let's take a closer look at each of these weaknesses.

Meetings tend to be a slow way to get things done. They do not lend themselves to quick, decisive actions. One obvserver of committee meetings stated, "They keep minutes and waste hours." Delays, of course, are not always bad. Delays provide time for objective reviews or ideas, and development and/or consideration of alternatives. Thus, delays can lead to better decisions.

For a meeting to be effective, those with expertise and/or the need for action, should attend. Inviting experts and providing sufficient time to consider alternative solutions to problems increases the cost of a meeting. However, the cost to an organization if the meeting is not held may be far greater.

There is a tendency at meetings to bring the individual thinking of the participants in line with the average quality of the group's thinking. This leveling effect takes place when a participant begins to think less as an individual and adapts the ideas of other participants. The normal tendency is to accept ideas of the most dominant individual at the meeting, although his ideas may not be the best. Leveling is not always undesirable; it tempers unreasonable ideas and curbs autocrats. The chairperson should try to curb the leveling tendency. One way to keep a dominating participant in check is to seat him directly to the chairperson's right.

The tendency for a decision made at a meeting to dilute or divide responsibility is a serious one.

When this happens, weak managers are prone to blame their failures on that decision. Such comments as "I didn't support this approach at the meeting" are used to explain their failure to perform effectively. The chairperson must be attuned to decisions that tend to dilute or divide responsibility and find a way to avoid them. All participants should be given an opportunity to express their viewpoints before the decision is made.

Wrap-up and Follow-up

The most important part of the meeting is its ending. After all information has been presented, all decisions made, all problem solutions found, or all conclusions reached, the chairperson must summarize and solidify the results. He must review decisions and then perceive any conflicts that might result. He must give those who made a major contribution to the meeting the credit they deserve. If no major decisions were reached, he must emphasize progress made and nail down assignments that will lead to a successful decision-type meeting in the future. The chairperson must always follow through on his promises to the group; otherwise participants will have no enthusiasm for participating in a future meeting if called upon to do so.

If a meeting is a prologue to action, the epilogue must produce results. When no action follows a meeting, the meeting can be considered a failure. The chairperson must never allow himself to think "activity" is the same as "accomplishment."

To translate decisions reached in a meeting into actions, the chairman must conduct the necessary follow-up action. A strategy used by a successful chairperson is to:

—Plan the follow-up procedure before the meeting

—Adjust the procedure during the meeting

—Consolidate the procedure after the meeting.

Although the chairperson cannot change what happened at a meeting, he can learn from it and plan for the next meeting. When he follows up on meeting decisions, he demonstrates that meetings can accomplish something. This will encourage future participation.

When Not To Hold Meetings

A meeting should not be held under the following circumstances:

—When there is no purpose for it

—When telephone calls, memoranda or some form of written communication will accomplish the same purpose

—When the participants are not prepared

—When the task has been completed

—When there is not a quorum

—When a key contributor cannot be present

—When there is no appropriate facility available

—When it does not appear to be cost effective to hold it

—When high priority work is to be accomplished at the same time.

Summary

Meetings are an essential n nagement tool. They are a fact of

life for organizations and their managers, whether people like them or not. Meetings present opportunities for face-to-face communication, and they can be valuable aids in planning and problem-solving. Further, good meetings can promote coordination, develop people and help get a job done. Poor meetings waste time and resources and discourage people.

The chairperson must have the right attitude; a well-conceived plan; a sharp focus on specific meeting objectives; and the ability to direct (focus), control, motivate, interpret and moderate the meeting. He must recognize that reaching initial or revised objectives of the meeting, and follow-up after the meeting, are essential to its success. During the meeting, he must "ride the tiger." His reputation as a manager is on the line at every meeting he conducts.

For a meeting to be successful, it must be supported within the organization and provide a needed decision or produce worthwhile actions. This will not occur unless several weaknesses related to meetings are overcome: their slowness, expense, tendency to create leveling, tendency to dilute or divide responsibility and tendency for someone to use the meeting as a platform for a power play.

Also, for a meeting to be successful, consideration must be given to the people who are invited to participate, the meeting place, the timing, seating arrangements, size of room and presentation aids.

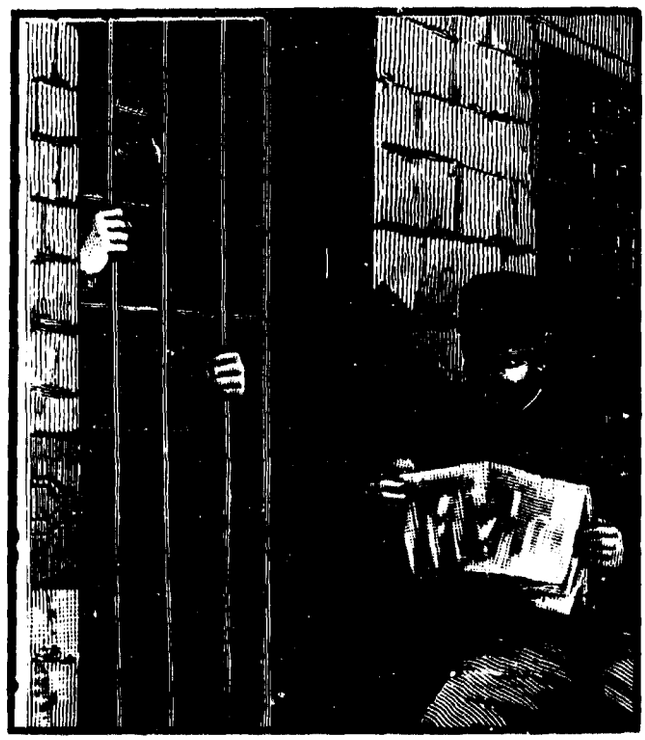
The value of an effective meeting may be summed up as follows: It serves as the cornerstone for successful team-building and progress within an organization.

Endnotes

1. Survey of *Fortune* 1000 companies by Heidrick and Struggles and reported in *USA Today*, March 3, 1989.

2. The term "organizational" meeting refers to committee meetings or gatherings within an organization [illegible] purpose of face-to-face discussions of mutual problems.

of Order, 1876.



A word too much always defeats its purpose.

—Arthur Schopenhauer

XIII

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AS A MANAGER

Effective communication involves a good exchange of thoughts, concepts, ideas or opinions between one person, or one group, and another. It involves sharing information and, at times, expressing emotions. In business and industry, three important communication processes occur, namely, gathering information with which to make decisions, passing on the decisions, and changing attitudes.

Effectively communicating may require planning, patience, and skillful execution. According to George Vardaman, "Effective communication is purposive symbolic interchange resulting in a workable understanding and agreement between the sender and the receiver."[1] Today, the successful manager or professional person can meld the messge into an effective presentation for achieving desired results.

Importance of Effective Communication

Let's turn attention to the importance of communication to management success. The need to communicate clearly has been recognized by notable people like Henri Fayol, French mining engineer, who included "unity of direction" among his seven management principles.[2] Charles I. Barnard, author of *The Functions of the Executive,* felt that maintenance of (effective) organizational communication was one of the basic executive functions.[3] Indeed, effective communication may be the essence of organizational activity.

The growth of interest in effective communication by management in the last century may be attributed to the following:

—Increase in the size of domestic companies and growth of international companies.

—Specialization of occupations and increased need for cooperation between them.

—Growth of national communication networks; i.e., telephone, radio, television, satellites, computer networks, fax machines and others.

—Increase in occupational mobility, meaning new employees must "learn the ropes" quickly.

—Belief that above changes and trends are likely to continue.

One reason for growing, widespread interest in effective communications is because our communications have not been as effective as they should be. Why? There has been:

—Frustration at all managerial levels because of lack of clearly defined responsibilities, and

—Lack of clear communications up and down the organizational ladder.

Broadly speaking, for every difficulty encountered within a modern-day organization, there seems to be some kind of insufficient, distorted, or poorly planned or timed exchange of information. Most of us recognize that communications problems have become one of the most frequent causes and effects of administative or operational failures.

Even in top management, these problems occur. According to Maier, communication gaps among managers often are wider than within the more routine positions they control.[4] An examination of four companies revealed communications failures are an everyday occurrence at all organization levels. It is interesting that failures are not confined to periods when major organizational changes are taking place.

Someone made the observation that the more education the subordinate has, the more accurate communication tends to be with management. Similarly, the more feedback involved between a managerial pair, the better listening ability of the superior, and the higher the managerial style of the subjects, the more effective the communication.

According to Peter F. Drucker, "Managing requires special efforts not only to establish common directions, but to eliminate misdirection. Mutual understanding can never be attained by 'communications down,' solely by talking. It results too from 'communications up.' It requires both the supervisor's willingness to listen and a tool designed to make employees heard."[5]

Number of Links in Process

Distance, in terms of the number of links (people) in the communication process from sender to final receiver, is a major cause of breakdown. For example, rumors become more inaccurate as links increase. Each link tends to add distortion.

Drucker states "Every additional administrative level makes the attainment of common direction and mutual understanding more difficult. Every additional level distorts objectives and misdirects attention. Every link in the chain sets up additional stresses, and creates one more source of inertia, friction, and slack."[6]

Many companies in recent years have reduced the number of levels in their organizations. The least number of links might be called, "the man, the manager, the management organization." Top executives have the greatest amount of decision-making power. Therefore, they have the greatest need for information that is correct and reliable. If information in the information channel gets heavy or clogged, management has less time to consider and digest it. The manager may have to be briefed by an assistant(s) and, as a result, the manager becomes insulated from

from the true facts of what is going on. Most managers, of course, like to think there is a pyramid of communication centered beneath them. In fact, there may be a labyrinth of communication barriers below them.

Speed of Process

Speed of information diffusion is an interesting study. It is effected by size of the organization, potency of the information (information of great interest travels faster), time for transmission (diffusion rates rise quickly and slow down gradually), space factor (physical proximity to the source of information is the strongest factor in determining whether a particular person receives the message), and stimulation factor (it takes a great increase in the initial input of information to get a small increase in diffusion of the information).[7]

Some researchers found that speed and accuracy in communication are complementary. The Duke of Wellington told his commanders to "do the business of the day in the day."

Frequency of Process

There is a direct association between frequency of communication and good leadership behavior. A person communicating with another receives recognition and a sense of well-being is enhanced.[8]

If there is a high wall or closed door between a subordinate and a manager, the subordinate's well-being is affected. This has been an argument in favor of open office and factory areas. There have been complaints about open areas. Some feel such conditions permit too much communication, disturbing people on the fringes trying to carry out assignments efficiently.

Quantities of official communication do not help solve management or organization problems. Communication improvement programs often prove ineffective because they overload formal communication channels. Effective functioning of the organization and the communication process depends on an optimum exchange of information. When a task is delegated to an administrative assistant, the assistant becomes insulated to some extent from certain aspects of the task assigned; he not only becomes insulated, but needs to be. Barriers to communication are sometimes necessary to get the job done. In an organization, some channel(s) must be kept open for the flow of crucial, available information.

Many managers find that of all activities they are required to carry on, verbal interaction is the number one form of contact. These managers believe that such contact may consume as much as 80 percent of their time. In a study conducted many years ago by Thomas Burns, it was found that as the management time spent in oral communication dropped from 80 percent to 42 percent, lateral communication with colleagues (in the upper percentages) changed to vertical communication.[9] Further, success in communication decreased as the direction changed.

Middle managers in formal organizations tend to overestimate frequency of personal contact with subordinates. Conversely, these managers often feel their most difficult communication problem is

getting sufficient time or attention from their immediate superior. For good reasons, they have a desire for adequate and successful communication with their superiors.

Promotionally minded subordinates tend to restrict communication to their superiors, perhaps in an effort to maximize positive aspects of their success in assignments. Subordinates distrusting their superiors tend to restrict communication with their superiors, generally feeling superiors may use information against them.

Communication Media

The main media for communication tend to be the same inside or outside the organization, such as speaking, writing, reading, and appearance. To be successful, the transmitted message and the received message must match as closely as possible. Failures occur in the "coding" and "decoding" process.

Most of us expect language to transmit messages accurately, and without help from within the organization. Most of us believe it is beneficial to document organizational (company) terminology. However, some people believe management should guard against undue reliance on the written word because it may become a substitute for face-to-face communication and, as such, lose its effectiveness.

More than one medium may be used at the same time. The media used may reinforce one another or they may contradict one another. Most of us find it difficult to reconcile conflicting signals, particularly if they involve gestures and appearance. For example, if actions are used as the means of communication, and the actions don't fit the statements made, communication problems arise.

Most research on communication media have been focused on problems of oral and written messages. Let's consider employee handbooks and position/job descriptions. In most organizations there is usually low reader interest in handbooks and published position/job descriptions. Details of work to be done do not necessarily reflect the degree of agreement between the manager and subordinate on the details of the work assigned.

"In-house" publications, like company magazines or newsletters, and periodic newspapers are often used as basic presentational media. Sometimes the house organ is used by management as its principal means of communication with employees.

House organs are interesting to readers when style is informal. Employees will usually obtain information from organizational contacts when the house organ is stiff, precise or filled with jargon.

On the other hand, difficulties arise when informal, spoken communications convey messages in-house. Vital pieces of information may be committed to memory but details may become blurred. An effective manager ensures that important information is committed to writing, but still speaks to subordinates more often than using memoranda or guides to action. Before a decision is made about the communication to use, a good manager considers comprehensibility of the message to be delivered.

In the final analyses, the human medium is the most important communication medium. When a man-

ager recognizes he is the communication carrier, this knowledge can be helpful in developing the perspective needed to maximize a communication capability. The manager, to be an effective communicator, must develop a proper attitude and outlook; personal communication confidence; ability to use language, voice, and body when orally communicating orders and ideas; clear and precise statement of purpose when writing a message; and an ability to recognize and handle needs and feelings of the message receiver, regardless of the communication medium he employs.

Closing Thoughts

I have briefly examined the role of communication in exchanging thoughts and concepts and its importance to management. I have focused on benefits and problems associated with the various communication methods. One thing every manager should understand is expressed well in the following quotation: "The manager's willingness to be accessible to subordinates and to attend to what is said plays a part not only as a direct link in the communications process but also as an example to others. Effective managers are typically regarded by their subordinates as being informed, open in communication, accessible, and receptive. They have personal skills in communication and give a great deal of time and attention to the communication process among their associates."[10]

Remember that communication is always a two-way process. At the outset, the communication sender must attempt to identify the receiver, and recognize the receiver will identify him through the communication.

The effective manager sends clear, concise, accurate and undistorted messages; further, he learns to be a good message receiver and "tunes-in" to non-verbal messages and oral and written messages. Lunchtime discussions by subordinates of such a manager don't lead to the question: 'I wonder what the boss really meant when he said....?"

What kind of message did you receive from reading this chapter. Have you really been communicating effectively, or do you need to make changes in your approach?

It has been said, "The morale of subordinates is related to their feeling of freedom to communicate with their superiors."

Endnotes

1. George T. Vardaman, *Effective Communication of Ideas* (New York, N.Y.: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970).

2. Henri Fayol, *General Industrial Management*.

3. Charles I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge, Mass:' Harvard University Press, 1951).

4. N. R. F. Maier, L. R. Hoffman, J. J. Hooven, and W. H. Read, American Management Association, Research Study No. 52, 1961.

5. Peter F. Drucker, professor of management, distinguished university lecturer, consultant, and author of more than a dozen books on management including *Management: Tasks-Responsibilities-Practices*.

6. Ibid.

7. S. Dodd, "Test Message Diffusion in Controlled Experiments," *American Sociological Review*, No. 18, 1953.

8. Chris Argyis, et al, *Business Behavior Behaviorally Viewed*, Dorsey, Homewood, Illinois, 1962.

9. Thomas Burns, "The Direction of Activity and Communications in a Departmental Executive Group," *Human Relations*, No. 7, 1961.

10. F. Mann and J. Dent, *Appraisals of Supervisors*, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1954.



There is no Heaven but clarity,
no Hell but confusion.

—Jan Struther

XIV

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN COMMUNICATION

How people communicate, seek information and obtain intelligence is changing radically. Today, telephone lines carry more than voice conversations. They carry high-quality television pictures and things like electrical impulses necessary to make possible remote electrocardiogram heart diagnosis. Robert Lucky, American Telephone and Telegraph, said he believed high fidelity text, music, animation, sensory data, light, color, remote control commands, information from computerized bases, communications between personal computers, video games, music videos, the news, facsimile (fax) copies of documents, numbers and instructions would be circulating through the (telephone) network as disembodied bits of information. He added, "I'd like to think of the telephone network as something that puts you in touch with a larger intelligence. Whether human intelligence—singly or in groups—or computer intelligence, I'm talking about accessing intelligence."

It is obvious that as our society grows more complex, so do our communications. This can be attributed partially to exponential growth of new knowledge in almost every area of professional knowledge. Vannevar Bush, Franklin D. Roosevelt's science advisor, was probably the first person to recognize the impact of this phenomenon on effective communication in an article appearing in the 1945 *Atlantic*. He suggested development of the Memex machine to enhance the communication process by providing quick access to large data bases of information. Since then, technological innovations have enhanced communications. Some of the devices/techniques being used with marketable success are the computer, telephone, radio, television, fax machine, teleconferencing and videoconferencing. We are becoming electronically interdependent. Relationships being formed across international boundaries were not possible a few years ago.

It is important to note that these tools and techniques will not, simply by their use, result in effective communication. Essential ingredients for effective communication must be present when using the technology. Although we use the telephone to talk to someone, we need good communication skills. The telephone serves only to enhance the process. Hence, technology, is an enhancing mechanism, is good only when we apply it effectively.

Computer

The computer is a widely used instrument today. Electronic mail (E-mail) software allows users to send notes to other users in a fast and organized manner. E-mail messages are coordinated/sent to specific individuals without fear of losing information in the distribution system. Messages can be tagged to indicate to the sender that the receiver read the note. No more... "It must have been misplaced." Time is saved in coordinating and conveying a message via E-mail and this improves communication. Word processing, spreadsheets and data base management packages make information transmittal easier to perform. New programs have increased the efficiency in how we organize, analyze and present information. Using communication software allows the sending of large documents via telephone lines fast and efficiently. Transmittal of information is significantly faster than mail delivered by the United States Postal Service. On-line catalogs and bulletin boards allow us to order goods and services and learn new ways to use the computer for communication.

Telephone

The telephone, a central part of modern communications, is a useful tool at home and work. We cannot perform effectively without using this instrument. It is rare to find a home or a desk at the office without one.

The popularity of the cellular telephone, which allows us to converse with others while driving to and from work or while working in the back yard, is increasing. The cellular telephone has been referred to as the linchpin of the mobile office, and industry analysts predict that more than 12 million cellular telephones will be in service in the United States within 5 years.

Technological capability of the telephone is expanding. Telephones are available with a memory to store telephone numbers and invoke them automatically; to talk or hear without using a handpiece; to answer a call without being present; to determine the number of an incoming call; and to take several calls at once. Some telephones have features normally reserved for businesses like intercom and conference calling. Allen M. Stewart, vice-president of GTE Corporation, believes that just as the Touch-Tone surpasses the rotary-dial telephone, new technology will make Touch-Tone beeps obsolete. Research and development communication initiatives concerning the handicapped provide technology making communications easier. These features improve our ability to communicate more effectively. Recently, some manufacturers have introduced pocket telephones, some weighing less than a pound.

Technology has been changing *how* we communicate. Consider that more than two billion times every day, people pick up a telephone at work or at home and make calls. If we were to sample calls randomly, we would hear about people's lives in many languages. In the future, there will be few human operators to hear those voices on the line; conversation will be transformed by computers into bits of numbers pulsing through wires and bouncing off satellites.

The dividing line between telephones and computers is disappearing and the two instruments will soon become one. When the telephone of the future is also a computer, it will be as programmable as any state-of-the-art personal computer. If our telephone is not used as our personal computer, then our personal computer will probably serve as our telephone. According to a Stanford University computer scientist, "By the turn of the century, there will be telephones smarter than the people using them."

Radio

The radio remains a significant communication tool. It is a popular device among music lovers of all ages. It also informs us of current events and weather conditions. Radio talk-shows provide an opportunity to express our opinions on local, state, national and international issues. The radio is a medium through which public opinion is shaped. The radio informs us about the availability of goods and services through creative advertisements and, importantly, it educates us.

Television

Television is probably the most powerful influence in our daily lives. In addition to the features offered by radio, television provides us real-life pictures of current events. Seeing current events in the world has brought people of many nations closer together. They can watch history unfold instead of reading about it. While there is still a long way to go, television is breaking down cultural barriers. Television coverage of the Vietnam conflict brought it into the homes of millions of Americans each night, and had a profound affect on public opinion. Television also brings sporting events, talk shows, educational programs, cultural events, movies, and diverse programs into our homes. We can view current movies and special programs with video cassette recorders (VCR); further, the video camera allows us to shoot home movies and local events and play them back immediately. Cable television (via satellites) brings us a variety of programming. No other communication medium has made the world a smaller place or had a more profound impact on our lives.

Facsimile Machine

The fax machine, using telephone lines, permits transmission of documented information over long distances in a short time. This improves our ability to make decisions quickly. The industry-standard typical page takes about 20 seconds to fax, and most machines have a transmission confirmation feature that lets the sender know a message has been successfully transmitted. Many fax machines have memory which enables storage of documents transmitted or received.

Until recently, few companies used fax machines; today, the fax machine is considered a business necessity. Recently, this technology has been used to market goods and services.

Teleconferencing and Videoconferencing

Conferences and meetings are conducted by integrating use of telephone, television and satellite technologies. Benefits can be measured by time and dollars saved. Conferences and meetings are held without attendees leaving their office environment. This translates into travel savings and, subsequently, into productivity savings.

Value of Technological Advances

Advances in technology are altering ways people relate and communicate. We may be less inhibited when communicating through technology, and tend to be less self-aware. Although we may develop a "me-and-my-machine" feeling, we cannot forget the people receiving our outputs.

In face-to-face situations, we see the speaker's smile or the place he takes at a meeting, giving a cue to his status. In computer exchanges we have no such feedback. We may be "blind" to recipients' backgrounds and knowledge; therefore, it is imperative that the message being transmitted be as clear as possible.

When using a computer to send E-mail, we do not see the receiver and do not get non-verbal cues. There are social norms around E-mail, which is not the same as meeting someone in person, or talking on the telephone and identifying ourselves. Consequently, the result of these computer exchanges are less predictable, but they can be effective. If we recognize potential problems at the outset, we can make plans to deal with them.

Shy people usually benefit from modern-day technologies, which help communicate without embarrassment. No one is looking when you transmit a message, and you do not have the self-conscious feeling you may expe ence when someone is present.

Technology sometimes promotes deeper relationships between people, who may "meet" each other via using a current technology and later, meeting face-to-face. In such cases, technology stimulates human contact rather than reduces it.

Communication through technology is a democratizing effect. In a face-to-face meeting, one person may monopolize the discussion, another may tend to compete, and others may take minor roles. On a computer, participation tends to level out. Participants talk about the same amount, and tend to be less conscious of status, having a feeling of being protected by anonymity.

Using technology forces us to organize our messages. We do not place a telephone call without a reason and, therefore, give serious thought to what we are going to ask or how we are going to respond to anticipated questions or statements. Using computers to instruct demands time for analysis and design of the lesson. The subject-matter expert and computer programmer painstakingly define

objectives, content, and possible alternative tracks to students' responses during the lesson.

If we put this thought together with the absence of inhibitions mentioned previously, people communicating by computer with superiors may send copies to people they would not ordinarily contact. Thus, the communication process is broadened.

Final Thoughts

We would be remiss to discuss communication today without discussing technologies. It is important to note that technologies discussed here are only tools or devices to enhance or improve communications. Foundations and principles governing effective communication must be present whether or not we use technology. Effective communication will not occur because we use the telephone or watch television; we must remember we are only using a different medium to send or receive a message. Communication is a complex two-way process, which requires a message, transmitter, medium, receiver and feedback. Efficient application of writing, speaking, listening, reading and questioning skills are critical.

The synergism of communication skills, technology and the human creative spirit can impact positively the effectiveness of our information transmittal. This is increasingly evident as society grows in knowledge and recognizes problems demanding better ways to communicate.

Endnote

This chapter was coauthored with Dr. J. Robert Ainsley, Professor of Educational Technology, Defense Systems Management College.



The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar and coffee. And I pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun.

—John Davidson Rockefeller

EPILOGUE

I would like to emphasize once again that good communication is the essence of good management, and skill in communication is essential to every other management skill.

As a manager, you get things done through other people. Thus, you must be able to communicate effectively (Chapter XIII). There is no one best way to do this and there are barriers (Chapter X) to any communication technique that might be selected. Whatever the technique selected, the communication will be effective only if the message is understood by the recipient. If the message is not understood, communication has not really taken place. Don't underestimate the importance of a question (Chapter IX).

In a given situation, there are a number of factors to be considered before engaging in the communication process. Among them are the following:

—What is your purpose in communicating?

—What are the feelings, intentions, and interests of the person or persons with whom you plan to communicate?

—Through what medium or media can you best transmit the message?

—What kind of feedback do you expect, want or need?

Effective communication is a two-way process (Chapter II). The message must reach the receiver in a form he can understand. The receiver must provide appropriate feedback indicating the message has been received, understood, and appropriate action is being taken. Remember, the grapevine thrives only in the absence of an adequate formal communication process.

Skill in making effective presentations can be acquired if you are willing to apply the common sense and organized effort you put into any other job. A speech or briefing is a useful communications tool and can advance the interests of the organization and of the speaker. B. C. Forbes believed that:

> Speaking and writing form a very large part of the whole of human activities, business as well as social. The art of oratory, in public life, is essential to the highest success. The best way to become a good talker (or writer) is to have something to say. Studying how to talk (or write) will improve the mind, and paying diligent attention to improving the mind will, almost unconsciously, gravitate into other forms of self-improvement.[1]

Sage advice, indeed. Clarence B. Randall said, 'The ability to speak and write the English language is indispensable today for advancement.''[2] Speaking can be easy if you know your subject and follow the suggestions contained in Chapters IV and V. You can then face your audience confidently, deliver your message effectively, and capitalize on the opportunity your appearance offers.

Only a small fraction of the total message being communicated between two people is carried by the words they use. Non-verbal messages are transmitted and they require interpretation. Non-verbal communication skills were discussed in Chapter VI. In that chapter, it was pointed out that managers should develop an awareness of kinesics because it provides them with a powerful technique to use in reaching their organizational objectives. Unfortunately, silent messages may be clear or may be misunderstood. People tend to perceive what they expect to see, regardless of the message the originator intends to convey.

Words and body movements when taken together provide the receiver with a much better indication of the sender's true feelings than either words or gestures taken separately.

Skill in listening (Chapter VII) isn't easy to acquire, but it can be developed with practice. Effective listening is important to all personnel in the organization, not only to managers. It helps to create and maintain good relationships up and down the chain of command, and with peers. It may prevent misunderstandings and rumors.

Sometimes the sender speaks and the receiver listens; sometimes the sender writes (Chapter III) and the receiver reads (Chapter VIII). It should be clearly understood that it is the perceptions of the listener or reader, not the intentions of the speaker or writer, that determine what is understood. If the perceptions of the sender and receiver are similar, the communication environment will be supportive; if not, the environment will be defensive.

There is a need for interactive communication in any organization (Chapter XI). According to Gerald Goldhaber, the most important purposes for this type of communication are:

> 1. Task coordination. The department heads may meet (periodically)...to discuss how each department is contributing to the (organization's) ...goals.
>
> 2. Problem solving. The members of a department assemble to discuss how they will handle (such a thing as) a threatened budget cut; they

may employ brainstorming techniques.

3. Information sharing. The members of one department may meet with the members of another department to give them some new data.

4. Conflict resolution. Members of one department may meet to discuss a conflict inherent in the department or between departments.[3]

The examples given above for each major purpose of interactive communication involve departmental or interdepartmental meetings. Meetings of this nature and the committee structures existing today in most organizations provide a major contribution to interactive communications. Written reports distributed within and between departments provide another means of interactive communication. When a classical organizational structure fails to meet the needs of interactive communication, the informal organization and groups have to meet this need.

Koontz and O'Donnell, noted exponents of management practices, have made the following observation regarding importance of meetings:

> ...meetings are effective in achieving coordination. They represent a deliberate effort on the part of the superior to bring into personal contact the people especially concerned with a subject. Their purpose is not to "tell" the members something—since coordination cannot be imposed from the top—but to encourage members to integrate their own efforts.[4]

To this we might add that good meetings improve coordination, develop people, and accomplish the job. As stated in Chapter XII, an effective meeting serves as a cornerstone for successful team building.

George R. Terry sums it up this way: "Communication requires time to speak, time to listen, time to write, time to read, time to interpret, and time to take action."[5] Every manager or would-be manager should recognize the need to provide sufficient and accurate information to the right people in a timely manner so they can perform their duties effectively.

Final Thoughts

As we look to the future, a question we should ask ourselves is: "Can we communicate with each other effectively, or can't we?" If the answer is "yes," mankind will be able to live at higher intellectual and material levels and have a glorious future. If the answer is "no," mankind will wind up in an unholy mess of hostility and destruction, social and economic collapse, and political degeneration.[6]

Finally, "There are seven things that mark the wise man and seven that mark the unwise man. The wise man does not speak before one who is greater in wisdom than he is; he does not interrupt another in his speech; he is not hasty to answer; he asks pertinent questions, and answers to the point; he speaks first upon the matter first in order, and last upon the last; when he does not understand the matter under discussion, he confesses: I do not understand it; and when the truth is presented, he readily acknowledges it. The reverse of these things marks the unwise man."[7]

Endnotes

1. B. C. Forbes, "Thoughts...on the Business Life," *Forbes*, February 15, 1977, p. 120.

2. Clarence B. Randall, "The Myth of Communications," *Dun's Review and Modern Industry*, Spring 1960.

3. Gerald M. Goldhaber, *Organizational Communication* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company Publishers, 1974), p. 121.

4. Harold Koontz and Cyril O'Donnell, *Essentials of Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), p. 32.

5. George R. Terry, *Supervision*, revised edition, (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1978), p. 64.

6. Frank Snowden Hopkins, "Communication: The Civilizing Force," *The Futurist*, April 1981, p. 39.

7. Author unknown.



The man who can make others laugh secures more votes for a measure than the man who forces them to think.

—Malcolm de Chazal